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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 15 November 2018

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Export Strategy

1. **James Morris** (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): What recent progress the Government have made on their export strategy. [907609]

10. **Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): What recent progress the Government have made on their export strategy. [907620]

The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox): This is the first time that I have spoken in the House since the death of Sir Jeremy Heywood. He was a dedicated public servant to whom I, among many, owe a great debt. I am very fortunate to have been able to call him a friend as well as a colleague. I am sure that Members on both sides of the House would join in a tribute to Sir Jeremy.

The export strategy launched in the summer consists of the four ways in which Governments can make a difference: encourage, inform, connect and finance. It is only by making it easier for businesses that we will increase our exporting performance. Governments do not create wealth, businesses do.

James Morris: Last week, I visited Crosby Premier Stampings in Cradley Heath. The company has been forging for nearly 100 years in the Black country, and currently uses traditional and high-tech methods. It is increasing its global sales, including to China. Will the Secretary of State explain how the export strategy will help other such small and medium-sized enterprises to develop their export business worldwide?

Dr Fox: My hon. Friend is a great champion of business in the Black country, but all businesses are different, and we want to help both new and seasoned exporters of all sizes with the sort of support that is appropriate to the barriers and opportunities that they will face. SMEs in particular will benefit from increased peer-to-peer learning, improved access to specialist advice, and the thousands of export opportunities on the great.gov.uk website.

Sir Edward Leigh: When I was a Minister at the Department of Trade and Industry, the Trade Minister had no control over trade policy—they just went on jollies around the world promoting trade. As we will now be stuck in the EU customs union for years to come, with no ability to make our own trade deals, will the Secretary of State change the name of his Department to the “Department for International Trade Promotion and Engagement with the Customs Union”?

Dr Fox: The Government’s intention is that we will leave the European Union in March, we will exit the implementation period in December 2020, and we will have a fully independent trade policy. We have already begun—and finished—the first four consultations on independent trade agreements with other countries.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): It is welcome that, under the draft EU withdrawal agreement, businesses that export to the EU can continue to discount tariffs, volumes, customs, fees and so on, but the documentation—this relates directly to future export strategy—says:

“the development of the United Kingdom’s independent trade policy will be the subject of the future relationship negotiations.” Given what we have seen so far, that effectively means that the UK will not be able to strike differentiated deals with third countries with which the EU currently has a deal. Given that that contradicts precisely everything that the Secretary of State has been saying, why has he not resigned?

Dr Fox: We have made it very clear that, in the areas where the EU already has an agreement, our first aim is continuity. We have also made it very clear that we have further ambition for bespoke agreements with those countries.

Mr Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): One key part of the Government’s strategy is to build an extensive business-to-business network of exporters. What progress has been made on that? In particular, what role are business organisations playing so that we can foster such a network?

Dr Fox: One of the demands of the business community during the consultation was to give them better online communities so that they can speak to one another. We discovered that businesses did not necessarily want to talk to Government advisers, but wanted much more to speak to those who had faced similar business challenges and to ask how they had overcome them. That is under way, and we have recruited more staff to make that happen.

Foreign Direct Investment

2. **Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of trends in the level of foreign direct investment. [907610]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Graham Stuart): The UK, I am pleased to say, remains the No. 1 destination in Europe for foreign direct investment. We have recently published analyses of the positive economic impact of FDI, which show the benefits of investment to the UK and how the Department is delivering national wealth by attracting investors to our key industries.

Alex Chalk: Foreign direct investment in the UK has been directly responsible for more than half a million jobs since 2010, including hundreds in my constituency. Whatever the shape of future trade policy, will the Minister assure me that, building on that figure, increasing our attractiveness to foreign direct investment remains a priority for this Government?

Graham Stuart: My hon. Friend is absolutely right—it is a priority of this Government to create even more high-paying jobs by making the UK the most business-friendly market in the world. The Labour party's promise to seize the assets of foreign pension funds invested in the UK threatens our prosperity and the retirement of those around the world who have put their confidence in Britain.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): In the past few years I have often thought that I live on a parallel planet to the Minister. That obviously is the case, because the senior people I meet from the United States, China and other major economies are not investing, or thinking of investing, in the United Kingdom, partly because of the uncertainty over Brexit and because, if we leave the European Union, they want a market of 650 million, not 65 million.

Graham Stuart: I can confirm that the hon. Gentleman does live in a parallel universe, but it is one that he shares with his Front Benchers. His parallel universe is entirely divorced from the reality that investors are coming to the UK. We are the No. 1 foreign direct investment destination in Europe. We have the largest stock, and that is why we have been able to support more than half a million new jobs since 2010. The biggest threat, investors tell me, is that of Labour coming to power.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): During the referendum, "Project Fear" told us that global business interest in the UK would collapse if people voted to leave. Can the Minister confirm whether foreign direct investment has gone up or down since the referendum in June 2016?

Graham Stuart: I am glad to confirm to my hon. Friend that our stock of foreign direct investment has gone up. We remain the No. 1 destination in Europe and are seeing companies in so many sectors coming here. Investors have some concerns about Brexit but, as I have said, what they are really alarmed about is the prospect of Labour seizing their assets and destroying the job creation that investment brings.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): May I associate myself with the Secretary of State's remarks about Sir Jeremy Heywood?

I was delighted, if somewhat surprised, to see the Secretary of State at the Dispatch Box this morning. He and his Ministers have talked about a record number of FDI investments in the last full year, 2017, but he knows that, in value, it was actually the worst year for inward investment since 1994. Complacently, he celebrates the forecast by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development for the first half of 2018, but he knows that the UNCTAD report states that this reflects "a surge in intra-firm loans".

These are loans that are often used to minimise tax by creating an artificial debt shield and they create no new jobs in the UK. How many such intra-firm loans are in the FDI statistics, and what assessment has the Minister made of the reduction in tax receipts to the Exchequer as a result?

Graham Stuart: The UNCTAD figures that measure foreign direct investment showed the UK moving above the United States into third in the first six months of this year, but the hon. Gentleman is entirely right to say that they include intra-company loans. Any figures around flow should be treated with caution; the most important thing is the stock of foreign direct investment in this country. As my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) said, if we had listened to some, we would have expected divestment. There was no divestment; there were increases in investment. In the last year, if I may deal with what is most important to me and my constituents, there were 75,000 new jobs created by foreign direct investment.

China: Trade and Investment

3. **Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with the Chinese Government on increasing bilateral trade and investment. [907611]

7. **Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): What recent discussions he has had on trade and investment with the Chinese Government. [907617]

The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox): I have made five visits to China this year. The most recent was when I led the UK delegation to China's International Import Expo in Shanghai this month, supporting British firms to sign deals worth over £2 billion.

Sir Desmond Swayne: How are we doing in terms of goods and services, and how does that compare internationally?

Dr Fox: Our ratio of goods and services exports to the world outside the European Union is roughly 50:50. Eighty per cent. of our exports to China are goods, which suggests that the Chinese service market is not as open as it should be. Therefore, much of our effort is based on trying to encourage the Government of China to open up its services, which of course would be of benefit to the United Kingdom, the world's second biggest services exporter.

Jim Shannon: Let me put on record my thanks for the work that the Minister and others have done to secure the £250 million deal for Lakeland Dairies' milk products over a five-year period, which secures jobs as well.

In the past 10 years alone, China's GDP has tripled. What assessment has the Department made of the potential trade and investment opportunities for the UK, with special reference to the agri-food industry?

Dr Fox: We are conducting a joint trade and investment review with China as part of looking ahead to deepen that relationship. Under the UK-China Joint Economic and Trade Commission, we lobby for increased market

access sector by sector. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his comments; it is not the highest publicity aspect of the Department for International Trade, but opening up a sector worth quarter of a billion pounds to Northern Ireland is a big achievement.

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): Last year, British exports to China grew by 28%. What assessment has the Secretary of State made of how that trajectory will rise over the next few years?

Dr Fox: We know from a number of consumer surveys that about 60% of Chinese consumers say that they would pay a higher price for produce just because it is made in the United Kingdom. We are associated with the quality end of the global market, which is the rising market in China, and I expect our exports there to continue to grow apace.

Creative Industries

4. **Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab):** What steps he is taking to protect the creative industries in any future trade agreements after the UK leaves the EU. [907613]

6. **Sandy Martin (Ipswich) (Lab):** What steps he is taking to protect the creative industries in any future trade agreements after the UK leaves the EU. [907616]

The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox): The UK is home to a world-leading creative industries sector, which we will continue to support as part of our modern and ambitious trade policy. UK creative industries exported £40.2 billion of goods and services in 2016, and we recently completed a public consultation that will inform our future approach in trade agreements.

Bambos Charalambous: Can the Secretary of State reassure the creative industries that professional equipment such as musical instruments will not be subject to additional documentation requirements and tariffs at the border?

Dr Fox: That is exactly what we are seeking to achieve in the agreement the Prime Minister reaches—I take it that the hon. Gentleman is referring to the European market. Not only do we want to secure continued tariff-free EU access, but we want further liberalisation so that we increase potential global trade, too.

Sandy Martin: Can the Secretary of State confirm that trade in the creative industries of the EU will benefit from reciprocity of regulation on licensing and collective rights management?

Dr Fox: On services, we want an open and liberal arrangement with the European Union that goes well beyond the current World Trade Organisation commitments that both sides have, so we will want not just continuity of liberalisation, but an increase.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): May I make a particular plea for the gaming sector so that BAFTA-winning companies such as Wales Interactive, which is in my constituency, can continue to thrive, whether we do or do not leave the European Union?

Dr Fox: We will be leaving the European Union. It is important to note that sometimes the creative industries sector is generally underappreciated for the contribution it makes to the earnings of this country, not only through exports—I mentioned the £40.2 billion of goods and services exports—but through the income it generates for the United Kingdom. It is an important sector, which is why we put it at the heart of not only our industrial policy, but our trade policy.

Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab): The Society of Authors has called on the Government to ensure that copyright is not used as a bargaining chip in trade negotiations. Any future deals must ensure that international copyright treaties are applied by the book; anything else would risk damaging this important and iconic sector. Will the Secretary of State still be here to reassure British authors, the reading public and other creative industries that our gold standard copyright regime will be protected post Brexit?

Dr Fox: I should probably declare an interest as someone who has published a book and receives royalties, and who takes an interest in copyright. I and all Secretaries of State will be here to ensure that copyrights are protected.

Food and Agricultural Standards

5. **Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab):** Whether food and agricultural imports will have to meet the same (a) food safety and (b) sanitary and phytosanitary standards as domestic products under new free trade agreements after the UK leaves the EU. [907615]

The Minister for Trade Policy (George Hollingbery): The Government have been clear that future imports to the UK must meet UK food safety, animal welfare and environmental standards. We will not compromise our standards in pursuit of a trade agreement.

Daniel Zeichner: The Minister knows full well that UK consumers expect safe, high-quality food. The Secretary of State has assured us that he has 40 trade deals ready to go at the drop of a hat. Can the Minister tell us how many of those trade deals embed the exact same high food standards?

George Hollingbery: The 40 deals to which the hon. Gentleman refers are, of course, the deals that the EU currently has with partners. Our ambition is to transition those trade deals exactly as they are—or at least as closely as possible—and they contain the current measures.

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): We not only have really high welfare and hygiene standards, but reduce much antibiotic use by producing good-quality food. Can we be assured that food that does not meet those standards will not come into the country and that those standards will not be frittered away in an agreement on service industries?

George Hollingbery: I can say to my hon. Friend the Chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee that we absolutely have that intention. It is very straightforward. When I am abroad, I find on a regular basis, as the Secretary of State has said, that it is

the commitment to high standards in the UK market that so motivates consumers to buy our products. Not only is having these high standards the right thing to do, but there is no rational commercial incentive to do otherwise.

Emma Little Pengelly (Belfast South) (DUP): The so-called backstop would trap Northern Ireland in a common regulatory area under EU rules for our key export industries of manufacturing, agriculture and agri-food. What assessment has the Department made of the impact of that on Northern Ireland's ability to participate in UK-wide trade deals in relation to those key exports?

George Hollingbery: The Government have only just published the withdrawal agreement, which will be before the House shortly, and the Department will assess all issues of that sort in the context of the proposed agreement.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): The Secretary of State spoke earlier of how highly regarded UK goods are. That is true of successful exports such as dairy, smoked salmon and vegetables. I noticed that the Minister made a commitment in his initial answer to not dropping our food standards. Given that the United States has made it clear that that is exactly what has to happen to agree any future trade deals, will he now rule out any trade deals, including with the United States, that see any drop in our very high and successful food standards?

George Hollingbery: I can only refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave moments ago. We are scoping potential trade deals with all the partners with whom we have announced that we are seeking to do free trade deals, and our position on these standards remains exactly the same: we will not be changing UK law in this regard.

Automotive Industry

8. **Gerald Jones** (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): What steps he is taking to ensure that the UK automotive industry can continue to trade with the EU without disruption after the UK leaves the EU. [907618]

12. **Jessica Morden** (Newport East) (Lab): What steps he is taking to ensure that the UK automotive industry can continue to trade with the EU without disruption after the UK leaves the EU. [907622]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Graham Stuart): The UK's automotive sector is one of our strongest industries and, for that reason, it has been at the heart of our negotiations with the EU. The agreement announced last night will protect integrated supply chains and allow the industry to continue to thrive.

Gerald Jones: I would like to press the Minister further. What will the Department do to protect this specific supply chain, which is made up of many hundreds of SMEs across the country?

Graham Stuart: The hon. Gentleman is right, which was why we put the interests of that industry at the heart of our negotiations. That is why the deal provides

the supply chain with exactly the continuity needed to ensure its successful growth, and it is why I ask the hon. Gentleman to ensure that he supports it; otherwise, he will be putting all those automotive jobs at risk.

Jessica Morden: The UK's steel sector currently provides around a third of our automotive sector's steel requirements. What are Ministers doing to replicate the EU's steel safeguards, which prevent sudden surges of imports, after Brexit?

Graham Stuart: We have set up the Trade Remedies Authority, which I note the Labour party voted against. We have put in place all the measures necessary to ensure that producers are protected from dumping. It was a shame that the Labour party voted against the very measures that sought to protect British jobs, and I do not know why the hon. Lady joined those on her Front Bench in doing so.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): The Minister says that he will support all measures to help the supply chain, including small businesses in my constituency, but can he guarantee that he and the Secretary of State will still be in post by lunchtime to defend those industries?

Graham Stuart: It is unfortunate, as was shown by the previous vote, that the Labour party always puts politics ahead of the interests of ordinary people working in the automotive industry across this country. We are seeing more and more investment in this country, with the announcement of a major investment by McLaren in Sheffield only yesterday. Let us not play politics. Let us get the deal over the line and protect our growing and strong automotive industry.

Food and Agricultural Standards

9. **Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): What discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on ensuring that food and agricultural imports meet the same standards as domestic products after the UK has left the EU. [907619]

The Minister for Trade Policy (George Hollingbery): My ministerial colleagues and I regularly meet our counterparts from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to discuss a range of issues. When it comes to products imported to the UK, quality, safety and performance will continue to be paramount. Without exception, imports must meet all the relevant UK product rules and regulations.

Kerry McCarthy: We have heard quite a few times this morning that there will be no lowering of standards when it comes to imports under future trade deals, but the Government rejected an amendment to the Trade Bill to include a non-regression clause. Will they now support an amendment to the Agriculture Bill, which we will be discussing in Committee later today, that would allow for the same so that we can be sure that our food and our safety standards are protected?

George Hollingbery: I have noted some of the discussions on the Agriculture Bill, which I read earlier today, and I have noted the discussions on this. I have to say, and the hon. Lady should take some real encouragement from

this fact, that the standards on these issues in the UK are already higher than they are in the EU. That, I think, should give the House confidence as to the UK's intention on this. I will repeat one more time: there is absolutely no intention that the Government will reduce their standards in this area.

Gender-responsive Analysis

11. **Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): If he will ensure that a gender-responsive analysis is conducted at each stage in the development of new trade agreements after the UK leaves the EU. [907621]

The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox): I am committed to ensuring that UK trade policy supports gender equality. I will be publishing scoping assessments on each new free trade agreement and these will consider the effects of concluding trade deals on different groups, including gender groups.

Liz McInnes: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer, but what policy measures will he put in place to ensure that the sustainable development goals are met, particularly goal 5 to ensure equality for women and girls?

Dr Fox: The hon. Lady raises a very important point. It was one of the points we considered at the World Trade Organisation meeting of Trade Ministers in Buenos Aires. We looked at a study showing that of companies that trade only offline, four out of five are owned or run by men. Of those that run only online, four out of five are run or owned by women. This indicates that e-commerce is one of the prime development tools that we can use. The liberalisation of e-commerce and creating a global network of regulation is therefore one of the best ways we can combine trade and development policy, specifically to help women experience the benefits of the global economy.

Topical Questions

T1. [907624] **Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox): My Department is responsible for foreign and outward direct investment, establishing an independent trade policy and export promotion. Later today, the Board of Trade will meet in Wales for the first time in history, jointly hosted by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales. As the President of the Board of Trade, I can today announce a £240 million investment drive in Wales, which will create thousands of jobs. The Board of Trade will also today announce the launch of the UK's first energy investment portfolio, worth an estimated £5 billion.

Kerry McCarthy: Exporting companies in my constituency have told me that the Trade Secretary actually asked to meet them, but on condition that they did not discuss Brexit. Even more ludicrously, the Brexit Secretary—not the one who has just resigned, but the one who resigned before that—also said he wanted to meet them, but on the same condition. It is only £1 to go over Clifton suspension bridge from the right hon.

Gentleman's constituency into Bristol. If I offer to pay that quid for him, will he come to Bristol and tell our exporting companies what the hell is going on?

Dr Fox: The companies in Bristol seem to know already what is going on, without requiring any contribution from the hon. Lady—financial or otherwise. They are not only creating huge numbers of jobs, but are among the best export hubs in the whole of the United Kingdom, showing excellence in whole areas from the creative industries to aerospace. She need not worry too much.

T3. [907626] **Chris Davies** (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend inform the House what plans his Department has to support Small Business Saturday?

Dr Fox: There are a number of events up and down the country. I will be hosting events in my own constituency, using the export hub. A number of Members will already have used the hub in their own constituencies. This is a great initiative, and it is a chance for MPs of all parties to show just how much support they give to small businesses. I know that a number of MPs hosted events up and down the country last year. I will be doing so, and I urge my hon. Friend to do so, although I am sure he requires no urging whatsoever. I hope that Members on both sides of the House will use this opportunity to celebrate the success of small business.

T2. [907625] **Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): A few days ago I met the ambassador of a very large country in the far east. The UK is his country's trade gateway to the European Union, but clearly it will no longer be that after we have left. How will the Secretary of State safeguard existing business and trade with that country?

Dr Fox: We have set out our export and investment strategy, and we are one of the few countries in the world that are seeing a rise in investment at a time when foreign direct investment is dropping by 41%. We currently have one of the biggest increases in exports, and our trade policy and new system of trade commissioners will ensure increased levels of contact with Governments in all countries, including the one that the right hon. Gentleman failed to tell us the name of.

T5. [907628] **Mrs Kemi Badenoch** (Saffron Walden) (Con): Will the Minister update the House on what further steps are being taken to enable future trade deals?

The Minister for Trade Policy (George Hollingbery): As my hon. Friend will know, the Government have outlined to the House the progress that new free trade deals will make, and consultations on four potential deals were in the public realm from July to October. Those potential deals include the US, Australia, New Zealand and the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership, and we are currently in the process of analysing the extensive responses that we received.

T4. [907627] **Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab): European and British companies trading lawfully with Iran may soon face sanctions from the Trump regime, which has withdrawn from the Iran deal. When that happens, will the Secretary of State stand up for British companies, or will he cave in to Trump?

Dr Fox: The United Kingdom is committed to the joint comprehensive plan of action, and we want Iran to derive the economic benefits of that agreement. As the hon. Gentleman knows, there are two particular difficulties for British companies. One is access to finance for doing business in Iran, and the second is that it is often difficult for companies to know who the end point they are dealing with is, and whether they may in fact be part of the regime that would require sanctions to be applied. We work with British businesses to try to help them, but we understand that it is a real minefield.

Mr Speaker: Trudy Harrison—not here.

T7. [907631] **Neil Parish** (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): Small and medium-sized businesses often find it difficult to export because of the rules and regulations in many of the countries they export to. What more help can my right hon. Friend's Department give to those companies to get access to those markets? Growing our exports is great for our economy.

Dr Fox: My hon. Friend makes a useful point, and we have identified 400,000 businesses that could be exporting but do not because of their fear, or lack of understanding, of the markets to which they would export, and their cultural and regulatory frameworks. That is why we have established the framework of our trade commissioners around the world, and why we have put members of UK Export Finance in those markets, so that they can gain expertise in the financial areas that companies will enter, and will be there to advise companies in those markets.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The north-east is the only region in the country that still exports more than it imports. That involves large companies such as Nissan, as well as many great small start-ups and businesses that cannot afford expensive lawyers or management consultants. What specific guidance is available to those companies on how to continue and increase trading post-Brexit?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Graham Stuart): That is why we have the export strategy and we have worked with industry, which has been welcomed by small business groups and others. With staff in 108 countries around the world, and our regional and sector teams, we are working harder than ever before to ensure that the information flow, and the advice and opportunities for small businesses, is advertised in a better and more effective way than ever before. *[Interruption.]* Despite the hon. Lady's laughter, that is why last year our exports grew by more than 10% to £617 billion, and they are now more than £630 billion and counting.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

The Minister for Women and Equalities was asked—
Misogyny

1. **Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to tackle misogynistic behaviour. [907632]

The Minister for Women (Victoria Atkins): We are committed to tackling misogyny and gender inequality, and have pledged £100 million over four years to support our strategy to combat violence against women and girls. We will soon publish our plans to tackle sexual harassment, and we have asked the Law Commission to consider whether sex and gender should be included under current hate crime legislation.

Sir Desmond Swayne: Actions may be criminal, but will the Minister ensure that we do not stray any further into the realms of thought crime?

Victoria Atkins: Of course not: hate crimes are crimes that already exist as crimes in themselves, such as assault and criminal damage, but for which the hatred of a protected characteristic is the aggravating feature that enables judges to reflect that in their sentencing, and we have asked the Law Commission to consider whether sex and gender should be added to those protected characteristics. There will be no legislation for thought crime from this Government.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Recent work done in women's prisons shows that 48% of women prisoners have had a major brain injury before going to prison, the vast majority due to domestic violence. Could we not solve some of the problems of crime if we dealt more robustly with domestic violence?

Victoria Atkins: I am so pleased the hon. Gentleman raises this point. As he knows, the Government are committed to a domestic abuse Bill. The draft Bill will be published by the end of this Session and there will be a whole range of non-legislative measures with that proposed legislation as well. I hope the whole House will join me in fighting this terrible crime, because it has such enormous impacts not just on the immediate victims themselves but on wider society.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): I hope the Minister will agree with me when I say that language is extremely important in terms of misogyny and the way that men, in particular, behave in politics at all levels across the United Kingdom. Will she consider formal training not just for MPs but those in devolved institutions and councils across the country, because misogyny is never acceptable?

Victoria Atkins: I think that this is where we, as a society, need to make it very clear that we do not expect women to be shouted at in the street or have very unpleasant things said to them. I know there are Members of this House who suffer such abuse on a daily basis on social media. That is simply unacceptable, so I join the hon. Gentleman in saying to everyone in this House that how we use our language really matters and that we must ensure our young people grow up with that clear message, too.

Universal Credit

2. **Tommy Sheppard** (Edinburgh East) (SNP): What recent assessment she has made of the effect of the roll-out of universal credit on women. [907633]

The Minister for Employment (Alok Sharma): Universal credit treats all individuals equally, irrespective of gender. It provides one-to-one support and incentives to help claimants progress in work. The latest Office for National Statistics labour market statistics show a near record high rate for women in employment.

Tommy Sheppard: The Minister will know that universal credit pays less to lone parents under 25 than the current legacy benefits. Given that 90% of young lone parents are women, surely that is a clear and blatant case of discrimination against them. Will the Minister speak to the new Work and Pensions Secretary to ask for a review of this policy?

Alok Sharma: We support everyone on the universal credit system, including lone parents. As the hon. Gentleman will know, in the Budget we announced an extra £4.5 billion of support which included increasing work allowances, and childcare support is available for parents of young children.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): Will my hon. Friend join me in welcoming the £1.7 billion announced in the Budget to increase work allowances for families with children, which will mean that 2.4 million families will be better off?

Alok Sharma: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I always find it interesting when Opposition Members talk about helping their constituents. Sadly, what they do not then do is vote in the Lobby to support the policies designed to help those very people.

Emma Little Pengelly (Belfast South) (DUP): In Northern Ireland, we listened to organisations that work in the area of domestic abuse and introduced split payments. Will the Minister consider what has happened in Northern Ireland? It is a low-cost, no-cost option. Will he consider introducing it to ensure a safety net for those people who are in abusive and controlling relationships?

Alok Sharma: As the hon. Lady knows, split payments are available under universal credit. It is very important that if any individuals are facing the sort of abuse she talks about, we need to be able to signpost them to additional support. We give training to our work coaches to allow them to do that.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): Universal credit comes to Castlemilk in my constituency next month, where there is a women's group supporting women who have fled or who are living with domestic violence. They are deeply, deeply concerned about universal credit coming. Will a Minister please come to Castlemilk to meet these groups of women?

Alok Sharma: I go up and down the country to jobcentres, and I will, of course, go to Scotland in due course, but what I hope the hon. Gentleman will do in turn is talk to local jobcentres in his area and seek that assurance as well for his constituents.

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab): The reality is this: women who work, women without children, women with children, disabled women, black, Asian and minority ethnic women and women fleeing domestic violence have all been punished by universal credit. Report after

report has issued stark warnings about the design of universal credit and its impact on survivors, but the Government refuse to listen. Instead, they make claims about a landmark domestic abuse Bill, while their policies, staff and systems are failing to protect survivors. It makes no sense. Will the Minister show some compassion when he gets to his feet and halt the roll-out of universal credit until it is fixed?

Alok Sharma: We are keen to support everyone who is coming on to universal credit. That is why earlier this year we introduced £1.5 billion of support. In the Budget, we had another net £4.5 billion of support produced. With respect, I say to the hon. Lady that if she wants to help her constituents, she should vote for the measures whereby we put more money into the system.

Equality Act 2010: Commencement of Section 106

3. **Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab):** Whether she has made a recent assessment of the potential merits of commencing section 106 of the Equality Act 2010; and if she will make a statement. [907634]

The Minister for Women (Victoria Atkins): We keep any uncommenced provisions from the Equality Act under review. Equality is never a one-time fix and it is right that we keep re-examining these issues. However, political parties are responsible for their candidate selection and should lead the way in improving diverse representation.

Bambos Charalambous: Gender pay gap reporting has ensured transparency across the board and resulted in companies taking action. Section 106 could have the same effect, so will the Minister consult those parties on its introduction?

Victoria Atkins: I hope that every party is looking at this legislation. Certainly, the Conservative party is looking at how we can gather this information, not just for the national Parliament but for local government, because we believe it is absolutely essential that local government reflects the society it serves as much as this House does.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): I know that the Minister has committed to increasing the number of women in Parliament. Does she agree that we have a woman Prime Minister and strong women Secretaries of State, like the woman beside her at the Dispatch Box, the Secretary of State for International Development, who should be congratulated on the support and the leadership they show to women across the country?

Victoria Atkins: I think it is 2-0 to us. This is a serious point. In the Labour party, there are many, many strong, capable women I have very good working relationships with. It is a great shame that the Labour party has never managed yet to entrust the leadership of its party to a woman—[*Interruption.*] I see somebody volunteering on the Opposition Front Bench. We have the opportunity to bring more women into this Parliament through an event next week, on 21 November, when every Member of Parliament can bring a woman into the House of Commons and invite them to stand in this House.

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): A number of single parents have accessed the advance payment service under universal credit. However, as a result, they have found that the payments are required to be repaid in 15 months, or with 40% of their entitlement reclaimed. What will the Government do to ensure that many are not falling further into financial hardship as a result of advance payments under universal credit?

Mr Speaker: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Lady. The only difficulty with her question is that it does not seem altogether aligned with, or even adjacent to, the subject matter on the Order Paper. Her supplementary question would have been entirely pertinent to Question 2, but I am going to imagine that she has a great interest in section 106 of the Equality Act and that there is some sort of link, unknown to me but known to clever people like Ministers.

Victoria Atkins: I am very interested by the hon. Lady's question—I am so interested that I am going to ask the responsible Minister to write to her in due course. But I make the point that the more female Members of Parliament we have in the House, the more they can scrutinise this legislation.

Mr Speaker: Very wise, very deft—we are very grateful to the Minister.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): What justification is there for an eight-year delay in the implementation of section 106?

Victoria Atkins: The Government have kept that under review, but, as I said earlier, it is also for political parties themselves to act on it, so I am pleased that the Conservative party is looking into how we can gather the evidence in order to improve diversity in our candidates list.

Mr Speaker: Order. There is a certain amount of gesticulation from a sedentary position. I do not know whether the hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray) is signalling that the hon. Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley) wanted to come in on Question 2. I am sorry if she has been inconvenienced, but she needed to bob on Question 2, not Question 3. But never mind; she has made her point with considerable force and alacrity, and it is on the record. I would call her again, but she is entitled to only one. However, she has made her point very clearly, and we are extremely grateful.

Domestic Abuse Survivors: Workplace Policy

4. **Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab): If the Government will take steps to ensure that companies put in place workplace policies to support survivors of domestic abuse and reduce its effect on the workplace. [907636]

The Minister for Women (Victoria Atkins): The Government are committed to transforming their approach to domestic abuse, and that includes improving the response of employers to this devastating crime. We have therefore awarded £1 million to the charity Hestia for its "Tools for the Job" pilot project, which will help employers to improve their HR policies on domestic

abuse and will fund specialist employment domestic violence advocates. We are also working closely with the employers initiative, which does similar work.

Christian Matheson: Victims of domestic abuse and violence tell us that a short period of leave from work while they manage to sort out the difficulties in their lives would be helpful. Will the Minister agree to meet employers and trade unions to discuss the possibility of introducing paid leave for victims of domestic violence?

Victoria Atkins: Very much so. I keep pointing out to employers that having policies that can help to identify and support victims of domestic abuse in their workforces makes not only good moral sense but good business sense. I should be delighted to meet the hon. Gentleman, and employers and trade unions, to discuss what more we can do to help.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Of course, domestic violence affects not just women but men, too; but what contact has my hon. Friend had with companies such as the John Lewis Partnership, whose chief executive takes a particularly proactive approach to care in her company?

Victoria Atkins: We tend to focus on women as being the victims of domestic abuse because the statistics show us that it is a gendered crime, but I never forget the fact that, of course, men can be the victims of domestic abuse. That is why we are doing a great deal of work, both through the domestic violence and abuse Bill and through non-legislative measures, to support them and ensure that services are there for them.

I am sure that the John Lewis Partnership is part of the employers initiative, a piece of work in which I am very involved and about which I am very enthusiastic. I should be delighted to support John Lewis not just in a spending capacity, but in a legislative capacity as well.

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): When I recently visited a Leeds Women's Aid hostel, which does fantastic work throughout my city, it raised the problems experienced by women in low-paid work in accessing emergency accommodation. What support can the Government give to ensure that women feel confident enough to leave violent relationships and seek support?

Victoria Atkins: The hon. Lady has raised an extremely important point. There have been more refuge places since 2010 under this Government, and in the summer we reconfirmed the funding arrangements for refuges. When I visit refuges, which are incredibly important places for women who need to flee very dangerous situations, what I hear from those women is that they would like to have that support at an earlier stage so that they do not have to be the ones who leave—so that he leaves, rather than her—and we are working on that as well.

Gender Pay Gap

5. **Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): What progress the Government have made on reducing the gender pay gap. [907637]

6. **Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): What progress the Government has made on closing the gender pay gap. [907638]

The Minister for Women (Victoria Atkins): It's me again!

It is encouraging that the national gender pay gap is at its narrowest ever, but it will take time and action by employers if we are to close it entirely. I am thrilled that more than 10,000 employers reported their gender pay gaps this year, but that is just the first step. We are now working with employers to help them to understand their gender pay gaps and what plans they could make to close them.

Alex Chalk: Sunlight is the best disinfectant. Does my hon. Friend agree that not just 10,000 employers but 100% of all eligible employers have reported their data and that that provides a baseline on which future progress can be measured and recorded?

Victoria Atkins: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend, who is a committed feminist on this subject. Interestingly, not only have more than 10,000 businesses had to have this conversation about how they treat women in their workplace, but we know it is having a trickle-down effect on employers who do not necessarily meet the threshold. I know from the conversations that I have had with business leaders that they understand: the will is there for them to change. They want to do so, and they want to do so in partnership with us in government.

Christine Jardine: Given the early signs of the success of mandatory gender pay reporting for large businesses, has the Minister considered extending pay transparency to tackle wider inequalities, as recommended by the Institute for Public Policy Research, such as requiring companies with 50 or more employees to report not just on gender pay, but ethnicity and disability gaps?

Victoria Atkins: A huge amount of work is going on, and as the hon. Lady rightly says, the focus this year has been on gender inequality, but we are extending it to ethnic diversity and so on. Interestingly, we have just announced that we are consulting on whether businesses should publicise their parental leave policies to help women and carers.

11. [907645] **Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): What steps are the Government taking to mitigate the effects of the rising retirement age for the millions of women who will have accrued less in their pension pot due to the gender pay gap? [*Interruption.*]

Victoria Atkins: Forgive me if I have had not heard the hon. Gentleman correctly because of the hubbub in the Chamber; it is wonderful that everybody is so excited about women and equalities today.

The gender pay gap for women between the ages of 40 and 49 has fallen since 2010, but we published the "Fuller Working Lives" strategy last year and continue to work with businesses to ensure that everyone can adapt to the changing face of the workplace.

Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab): It is disappointing that the Government rejected the Women and Equalities Committee recommendation of a cross-departmental

race equality strategy. Can the Minister at least commit to making the reporting of a race pay gap compulsory, in line with the gender pay gap?

Victoria Atkins: As I have said, a great deal of work is going on, and I had a meeting earlier this year on exactly this point and look forward in due course to working with my colleagues in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on how we can close these gaps as well.

Business Start-ups

7. **Theresa Villiers** (Chipping Barnet) (Con): What steps she is taking to encourage more women to start their own businesses. [907640]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kelly Tolhurst): The Government-owned British Business Bank provides start-up loans for new entrepreneurs, and women account for 39% of recipients. The bank is also conducting a review into specific barriers female-led businesses face in accessing venture capital. All entrepreneurs in England can access advice and support from growth hubs and business support helplines, and 45% of the helpline users were women in 2017-18.

Theresa Villiers: Will my hon. Friend welcome the work of the entrepreneur Alison Cork in setting up the Make It Your Business network to support women who want to start their own businesses, including a branch in my constituency, Chipping Barnet?

Kelly Tolhurst: I welcome such initiatives that encourage and support women to start their own businesses, and I also appreciate the work of my right hon. Friend's constituent Alison Cork. Connecting people and building networks is an important part of supporting entrepreneurs. That is why the Chancellor announced in the autumn Budget another £20 million to strengthen local networks.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): Many women experience debilitating symptoms during the menopause, with 72% saying they feel completely unsupported at work during this time. Will the Minister meet me to discuss how we can make the necessary legislative changes so that these women feel supported?

Kelly Tolhurst: The hon. Lady is a champion for all things around women, and I would be happy to meet her at some stage to talk about her particular concerns.

Women in Parliament: Centenary

8. **Chris Davies** (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): What plans the Government have to mark the 100th anniversary of women being allowed to stand for Parliament. [907641]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Penny Mordaunt)
rose—

Hon. Members: Resign.

Penny Mordaunt: I know my duty, and at 10 am this morning, it was to be in this House answering questions. [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. We must do the Minister the courtesy of hearing her.

Penny Mordaunt: The Government Equalities Office will be holding a conference to celebrate the centenary of the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act 1918 on 21 November 2018. The GEO is also providing financial assistance to ensure that every MP in this House can invite a woman constituent into Parliament for the day, and I hope that all MPs will be doing that.

Chris Davies: I thank my right hon. Friend for her answer. It was great to see female MPs from around the globe pledge to support one another's fight for gender equality recently. Will my right hon. Friend update the House on that first-ever meeting of women MPs from every Parliament around the world?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that important point. One of the outcomes of that day, alongside the issues that the women discussed, was the desire expressed by me and the other host of the event that those women should form a lasting network to support one another in fighting for gender equality around the world.

Budget 2018

9. **Sandy Martin** (Ipswich) (Lab): What assessment the Government have made of the effect of Budget 2018 on women. [907642]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Penny Mordaunt): As a result of meeting the commitments to raise the personal allowance to £12,500 and the higher rate threshold to £50,000 one year early, 13.6 million women will see their income tax bill reduced in 2019-20 and 1 million women will be taken out of income tax altogether.

Mr Speaker: Topical questions. I call Alan Mak.

Sandy Martin *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I am sorry. I call Sandy Martin.

Sandy Martin: Thank you very much for allowing me a supplementary question, Mr Speaker. What steps are the Government taking to address the pensions inequality faced by older women affected by the rise in the state pension age?

Penny Mordaunt: I will be making an announcement on this in my topical questions statement. It is important that the Government Equalities Office, which has rightly concentrated on executive women and women in the workplace, should broaden the scope of its work to look at wider issues, including the financial fragility of some women.

Mr Speaker: My apologies to the hon. Member for Ipswich (Sandy Martin). I was trying to do three things at once, unsuccessfully.

Topical Questions

T1. [907647] **Alan Mak** (Havant) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Penny Mordaunt): To ensure that the Government Equalities Office is at the heart of this Government's work, the

Prime Minister has agreed that it will join the Cabinet Office from 1 April next year. This machinery of government change will provide a permanent home for the Government Equalities Office in line with the key recommendations of the Women and Equalities Committee earlier this year. It will enable the GEO to have even more influence and leverage within the Government, working with the Race Disparity Unit, the Office for Disability Issues and others to drive meaningful progress on equalities. This will be a step up in the work that the GEO can do to reduce inequality in the UK.

Alan Mak: Across all parties, nearly 50% of Havant Borough Council's councillors are now women. What steps is my right hon. Friend taking to encourage more women to stand for election at local government level?

Penny Mordaunt: The women's centenary suffrage fund supports initiatives across England to engage women in local democracy. We will also be funding an Ask Her to Stand event. We funded one in July that was attended by more than 300 women, many of whom were interested in becoming councillors. I congratulate my hon. Friend's borough on the progress that it has made.

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): I am pleased that the Minister for Women's duty was to be here at 10 o'clock. I wonder whether that will still be the case at 11 o'clock. A shocking new report on maternity support for female offenders by Dr Laura Abbott, a specialist midwife and academic, has highlighted a real gap between what is recognised as being needed and what is actually provided for pregnant women in prison. Can the House be assured that specific mandatory provision for pregnant women and new mothers in prison will be included in any future framework?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price): The hon. Lady raises an important point. We know that quite often the care given to female offenders in prison does fall short, and I will look at the specific issue that she raises. Clearly, we need to ensure that the best maternity support is given to them.

T3. [907649] **Mary Robinson** (Cheadle) (Con): There are now more than 1 million women-led small and medium-sized businesses in the UK—women such as my constituent Erin Rodgers, who set up Our Little Globe, an educational subscription box that aims to teach young children about the world and the people in it. New businesses such as Erin's need financial support in the initial stages to grow. Will my hon. Friend outline what support is available for women wanting to start their own businesses?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kelly Tolhurst): I thank my hon. Friend for her question and for highlighting her constituent Erin Rodgers. The Government support offer is available to all those wishing to grow a business, regardless of their age, gender or ethnicity. We back the Start Up Loans Company, which has been providing funding and incentives to support new entrepreneurs since 2012. It has delivered loans totalling £446 million, 39% of which went to women. I wish Our Little Globe every success for the future.

EU Exit Negotiations

10.30 am

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): With permission, I would like to update the House on our negotiations to leave the European Union. First, I want to pay tribute to my right hon. Friends the Members for Esher and Walton (Dominic Raab) and for Tatton (Ms McVey). Delivering Brexit involves difficult choices for all of us. We do not agree on all of those choices, but I respect their views, and I would like to thank them sincerely for all that they have done.

Yesterday we agreed the provisional terms of our exit from the European Union, set out in the draft withdrawal agreement. We also agreed the broad terms of our future relationship, in an outline political declaration. President Juncker has now written to the President of the European Council to recommend that

“decisive progress has been made in the negotiations.”

A special European Council will be called for Sunday 25 November. This puts us close to a Brexit deal.

What we agreed yesterday was not the final deal. It is a draft treaty that means that we will leave the EU in a smooth and orderly way on 29 March 2019 and sets the framework for a future relationship that delivers in our national interest. It takes back control of our borders, laws and money, it protects jobs, security and the integrity of the United Kingdom, and it delivers in ways that many said could simply not be done.

We were told that we had a binary choice between the model of Norway or the model of Canada—that we could not have a bespoke deal. But the outline political declaration sets out an arrangement that is better for our country than both of these—a more ambitious free trade agreement than the EU has with any other country. We were told we would be treated like any other third country on security co-operation, but the outline political declaration sets out a breadth and depth of co-operation beyond anything the EU has agreed with any other country.

Let me take the House through the details. First, on the withdrawal agreement, the full legal text has now been agreed in principle. It sets out the terms on which the UK will leave the EU in 134 days’ time, on 29 March 2019. We have secured the rights of the more than 3 million EU citizens living in the UK and around 1 million UK nationals living in the EU. We have agreed a time-limited implementation period that ensures businesses only have to plan for one set of changes. We have agreed protocols to ensure Gibraltar and the sovereign base areas are covered by the withdrawal agreement, and we have agreed a fair financial settlement—far lower than the figures many mentioned at the start of this process.

Since the start of this process, I have been committed to ensuring that our exit from the EU deals with the issue of the border between Northern Ireland and Ireland. I believe this issue can best be solved through our future relationship with the European Union, but the withdrawal agreement sets out an insurance policy should that new relationship not be ready in time for the end of the implementation period. I do not pretend that this has been a comfortable process or that either we or the EU are entirely happy with all of the arrangements that have been included, but of course that is the case—this is an arrangement that we have both said we never want

to have to use. But while some people might pretend otherwise, there is no deal that delivers the Brexit the British people voted for that does not involve this insurance policy—not Canada plus plus plus, not “Norway for now,” not our own White Paper. The EU will not negotiate any future partnership without it.

As the House knows, the original proposal from the EU was not acceptable as it would have meant creating a customs border down the Irish sea and breaking up the integrity of our United Kingdom, so last month I set out for the House the four steps we needed to take. This is what we have now done, and it has seen the EU make a number of concessions towards our position.

First, the EU proposal for a Northern Ireland-only customs solution has been dropped and replaced with a new UK-wide temporary customs arrangement that protects the integrity of our precious Union.

Secondly, we have created an option for a single time-limited extension of the implementation period as an alternative to bringing in the backstop. As I have said many times, I do not want to extend the implementation period and I do not believe we will need to do so. This is about an insurance policy, but if it happens that at the end of 2020 our future relationship is not quite ready, the UK will be able to make a choice between the UK-wide temporary customs arrangement or a short extension of the implementation period.

Thirdly, the withdrawal agreement commits both parties to use best endeavours to ensure that this insurance policy is never used, and in the unlikely event that it is needed, if we choose the backstop, the withdrawal agreement is explicit that the backstop is temporary and that the article 50 legal base cannot provide for a permanent relationship. There is also a mechanism by which the backstop can be terminated.

Finally, we have ensured full continued access for Northern Ireland’s businesses to the whole of the UK internal market.

The Brexit talks are about acting in the national interest, and that means making what I believe to be the right choices, not the easy ones. I know there are some who have said I should simply rip up the UK’s commitment to a backstop, but this would have been an entirely irresponsible course of action. It would have meant reneging on a promise made to the people of Northern Ireland during the referendum campaign and afterwards—that under no circumstances would Brexit lead to a return to the borders of the past—and it would have made it impossible to deliver a withdrawal agreement. As Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, I have a responsibility to people in every part of our country, and I intend to honour that promise.

By resolving this issue, we are now able to move on to finalising the details of an ambitious future partnership. The outline political declaration we have agreed sets out the basis for these negotiations, and we will negotiate intensively ahead of the European Council to turn this into a full future framework.

The declaration will end free movement once and for all. Instead we will have our own new skills-based immigration system, based not on the country people come from but on what they can contribute to the UK. The declaration agrees the creation of a free trade area for goods, with zero tariffs and no fees, charges or quantitative restrictions, across all goods sectors. No other major advanced economy has such an arrangement

[The Prime Minister]

with the EU and, at the same time, we will also be free to strike new trade deals with other partners around the world.

We have also reached common ground on a close relationship on services and investment, including financial services, which goes well beyond World Trade Organisation commitments. The declaration ensures that we will be leaving the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy, so we will decide how best to sustain and support our farms and our environment, and the UK will become an independent coastal state once again.

We have also reached agreement on key elements of our future security partnership to keep our people safe. This includes swift and effective extradition arrangements, as well as arrangements for effective data exchange on passenger name records, DNA, fingerprints and vehicle registration data. We have also agreed a close and flexible partnership on foreign, security and defence policy.

When I first became Prime Minister in 2016 there was no ready-made blueprint for Brexit. Many people said it could simply not be done. I have never accepted that. I have been committed day and night to delivering on the result of the referendum and ensuring the UK leaves the EU absolutely and on time. But I also said at the very start that withdrawing from EU membership after 40 years, and establishing a wholly new relationship that will endure for decades to come, would be complex and require hard work. I know that it has been a frustrating process—it has forced us to confront some very difficult issues—but a good Brexit, a Brexit which is in the national interest, is possible.

We have persevered and have made a decisive breakthrough. Once a final deal is agreed, I will bring it to Parliament, and I will ask MPs to consider the national interest and give it their backing. Voting against a deal would take us all back to square one. It would mean more uncertainty, more division and a failure to deliver on the decision of the British people that we should leave the EU. If we get behind a deal, we can bring our country back together and seize the opportunities that lie ahead. The British people want us to get this done and to get on with addressing the other issues they care about: creating more good jobs in every part of the UK; doing more to help families with the cost of living; helping our NHS to provide first-class care and our schools to give every child a great start in life; and focusing every ounce of our energy on building a brighter future for our country.

So the choice is clear: we can choose to leave with no deal; we can risk no Brexit at all; or we can choose to unite and support the best deal that can be negotiated—this deal. It is a deal that ends free movement; takes back control of our borders, laws and money; delivers a free trade area for goods with zero tariffs; leaves the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy; delivers an independent foreign and defence policy, while retaining the continued security co-operation to keep our people safe; maintains shared commitments to high standards; protects jobs; honours the integrity of our United Kingdom; and delivers the Brexit the British people voted for. I choose to deliver for the British people. I choose to do what is in our national interest. And I commend this statement to the House.

10.42 am

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I want to thank the Prime Minister for an advance copy of her statement.

The withdrawal agreement and the outline political declaration represent a huge and damaging failure. After two years of bungled negotiations, the Government have produced a botched deal that breaches the Prime Minister's own red lines and does not meet our six tests. The Government are in chaos. Their deal risks leaving the country in an indefinite halfway house, without a real say. When even the last Brexit Secretary, who, theoretically at least, negotiated the deal, says that "I cannot support the proposed deal",

what faith does that give anyone else in this place or in this country? The Government simply cannot put to Parliament this half-baked deal that both the Brexit Secretary and his predecessor have rejected. No deal is not a real option, and the Government have not seriously prepared for it. The Government must publish their full legal advice, the Treasury a full economic impact assessment of the deal and the Office for Budget Responsibility an updated economic forecast.

The withdrawal agreement is a leap in the dark—an ill-defined deal by a never defined date. There is no mention of the Prime Minister's favoured term "implementation period" anywhere in the 585 pages of this document. And no wonder, as there is precious little new to implement spelled out in either the agreement or the political declaration. Article 3 of the agreement states that transition can be extended to end by "31 December 20XX". Can the Prime Minister confirm that this permits an extension to be rolled on until 2099?

Can the Prime Minister confirm that if the UK Government cannot agree a comprehensive future relationship by January 2021, which few believe will be possible and which the last two years give us no confidence the Government can do, those negotiations would have to be put on hold, because the focus would then inevitably shift from negotiations on the future relationship to those on an extension of the transition period, including further payments to the EU? Article 132 sets out that process fairly clearly.

How confident is the Prime Minister that a deal can be done by the end of 2020, and can she confirm that if a new trade agreement is not agreed by 31 December 2020, article 132 will apply—meaning our paying a huge financial contribution to extend the transition period—if we are to avoid triggering the backstop, as the Prime Minister insists is her position? Should the backstop come into force, there would be no time limit or end point, and if either party requested a review and there was no agreement, it would go to independent arbitration. The backstop locks Britain into a deal it cannot leave without the agreement of the EU. Restrictions on state aid are hardwired into the backstop, with an arbitration mechanism, but no such guarantee exists for workers' rights.

Can the Prime Minister confirm that the backstop applies separate regulatory rules to Northern Ireland, creating a de facto border down the Irish sea, as Northern Ireland would be subject to the customs union but not the rest of the UK? That is despite the fact that the Prime Minister said this was something "no UK Prime Minister could ever agree to"—[*Official Report*, 28 February 2018; Vol. 636, c. 823.]

It is another of her red lines breached. In fact, the list of EU measures that continue to apply to the UK in respect of Northern Ireland runs to 68 pages of the agreement. This affects VAT declarations and rules of origin checks.

Moreover, it is clear that the Prime Minister's red line regarding the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice has also been torn up. By 2021, under the Prime Minister's plan, we will either be in a backstop or still be in transition, continuing to contribute to the EU budget and to follow the rules overseen by the ECJ. It is utterly far-fetched for the Prime Minister to say this plan means we take control over our laws, money and borders.

After two years of negotiation, all the Government have really agreed is a vague seven-page outline of political declarations, which looks like a substantial dilution of the Prime Minister's previously declared negotiating priorities. There is only the scantiest mention of workers' rights, consumers' rights and environmental protection; there is no determination to achieve frictionless trade, or even trade as frictionless as possible; and no ambition to negotiate a new comprehensive customs union that would protect trade, jobs and industry, so uncertainty continues for businesses and all those who work in them. That risks investment decisions being deferred even further, costing jobs and living standards. Many companies might decide that the lack of certainty simply means they themselves will Brexit. There is no clear plan to get a strong deal with the single market to ensure continued access to European markets and services, merely a vague commitment to go beyond the baseline of the World Trade Organisation. The First Ministers of Wales and Scotland made it clear to the Prime Minister that participation in a customs union to protect the economy and jobs was essential.

Likewise, there is no ambition to achieve continuation of the European arrest warrant or an equivalent, and no clarity on our status with Europol, Eurojust or even the Galileo project. There is no clarity either on a future immigration system between the UK and the EU. Following the Windrush scandal, many EU nationals here will have no confidence—no confidence at all—in the Government's ability to deliver a fair and efficient system.

The Brexit Secretary promised a "substantive" document; he is obviously no longer here, so can the Prime Minister inform the House of when that detailed framework agreement will be with us?

This is not the deal that the country was promised, and Parliament cannot, and I believe will not, accept a false choice between this bad deal and no deal. People around the country will be feeling anxious this morning—about the industries they work in, the jobs they hold and the stability of their communities and their country. The Government must now withdraw this half-baked deal, which it is clear does not have the backing of the Cabinet, this Parliament or the country as a whole.

The Prime Minister: Let me pick up some of the points that the right hon. Gentleman made. First, he said that no deal was not an option, but then complained that we were not preparing for no deal. Actually, we have been preparing for no deal, and we continue to prepare for no deal, because I recognise that we obviously have a further stage of negotiation with the European Council and then, when that deal is finalised with the European Council, it has to come back to this House. So we will continue those preparations.

The right hon. Gentleman said that the withdrawal agreement is ill defined. Five hundred pages of detailed legal text on the withdrawal agreement is not an ill-defined withdrawal agreement. He complained that the withdrawal agreement does not refer to the implementation period. Of course, it does refer to the transition period, which is exactly the same period of time.

The right hon. Gentleman then talked about the whole question of the decision on the backstop and the implementation period as coming at the end of 2020. Well, if he looks again at the documents that have been produced, he will see that actually the decision will be taken in June 2020 as to whether it is likely that the future relationship will not be in place on 1 January 2021. At that point, it will be for the UK to decide whether it wishes to extend the implementation period for a limited period, or whether it wishes to go into the backstop.

The right hon. Gentleman is wrong to say that we have not dealt with the issue of the border down the Irish sea. We have dealt with that, as I was clear in this House that we would. It took some considerable time to persuade the European Union to move from its proposal for a Northern Ireland-only customs territory to a UK-wide customs territory, but we have achieved that.

In relation to the question of workers' rights, there is reference to non-regression.

The right hon. Gentleman says that the outline political declaration does not refer to what we are proposing in terms of a free trade area for the future; in fact, the protocol explicitly does reference that. It sets out very clearly that we will be creating a free trade area between the United Kingdom and the European Union.

I am really not sure what document the right hon. Gentleman has read, because he said that there were no references to extradition, but there are indeed references to extradition. He also said that there was nothing about Europol, whereas there is an express reference that we will be including in the future document:

"Terms for the United Kingdom's cooperation via Europol and Eurojust."

I say to the right hon. Gentleman that there is indeed a choice before Members of this House: it is a choice of whether or not we go ahead with a deal that does deliver on the vote while protecting jobs, our security and our Union. Of course, what he wants is for us to stay in the single market and the customs union. That would not deliver on the vote of the referendum. We are delivering an end to free movement, coming out of the common agricultural policy and out of the common fisheries policy, and we are taking back control of our money, borders and laws. That is the right deal for Britain, and it is the deal that we will be putting forward before this House.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): It has always been a Brexiteer illusion that the country can leave the European Union treaties while selecting to retain all the benefits that we enjoy under the treaties and repudiating most, if not all, of the obligations. We have to face up to the fact that that is an illusion. Does my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister agree that the biggest single economic benefit—in fact most of the main economic benefits—that we have enjoyed from our membership over the last decades flow from the completely open

[Mr Kenneth Clarke]

border between the whole of the United Kingdom and the rest of the European Union and that upon that have been based huge flows of inward investment, the creation of just-in-time lines of supply and very many thousands of jobs in this country? So will she undertake that we will not change the present basis of that, which is the single market and the customs union, until we know what we are changing to and until we are satisfied that any change will retain those benefits and keep us completely open from any delays and costs caused by regulatory differences or anything else that would be created by moving away from where we are now? The economic future of this country will be threatened very considerably if we just decide, unilaterally, to walk out, as some of my colleagues seem prepared to recommend.

The Prime Minister: We have indeed heard from business a very clear message about the importance of frictionless borders, which is precisely why the proposal that the United Kingdom has put forward to the European Union is based on that concept of frictionless borders. The free trade area that we have put forward is precisely in that frame. My right hon. and learned Friend talks about remaining in the single market and the customs union. I do not believe that that is right for the future of the United Kingdom, because I do not believe that doing those things would deliver on the vote of the British people. There are various things that underpinned the vote. An end to free movement was crucial among those, and remaining in the customs union does not enable us to have an independent trade policy. I believe it is important that we do have an independent trade policy once we have left the European Union. We are negotiating the basis of our future trading relationship, but it is based on the concept of a free trade area and precisely the point that he makes about being able to move goods seamlessly across the border.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): I thank the Prime Minister for advance sight of her statement.

The Prime Minister comes before us today trying to sell us a deal that is already dead in the water. Not even her own Brexit Secretary could stand over it. Now, to lose one Brexit Secretary is one thing, but to lose two in a matter of months illuminates the chaotic nature of this Tory Government. The No. 10 front door has become a revolving one. The Prime Minister talks about taking back control. She cannot even control her own Cabinet. As I said yesterday, she is desperate and is increasingly looking defeated. What is absolutely shocking is that Scotland is not once mentioned in the document. Not once, Prime Minister, have the unique characteristics of Scotland's devolved settlement been worthy of mention—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. The Leader of the Scottish National party must be heard and heard with courtesy. [*Interruption.*] We are very grateful for your sedentary observations, Mr Graham, but I do not think that they greatly add to the quality of our deliberations. Everybody will be heard.

Ian Blackford: Not once have Scotland's unique characteristics in the devolved settlement been worthy of mention. There are 100 mentions of Northern Ireland,

mentions of Gibraltar, of Cyprus and of the Isle of Man, but no reference to Scotland. Utter contempt has again been shown to the Scottish Government, their Parliament and its people.

Differentiated deals for Northern Ireland means that Scotland can have its own differentiated deal. If Northern Ireland can stay in the single market, why not Scotland, Prime Minister? The Scottish Government have published compromise documents calling for just this and the Scottish Parliament has affirmed that position. Why does the Prime Minister ignore the democratically expressed position of the Scottish Government? What has happened to the claim of a partnership of equals? Why are the desires of Scotland being ignored, when we know that a differentiated settlement can be delivered? Why does the Prime Minister stand in the face of the legitimate demands of the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament? [*Interruption.*] The Prime Minister can shake her head, but it is a matter of fact and a matter of reality. Show some respect to the devolved institutions. The price—[*Interruption.*] You can bay, you can shout and you can talk about it being dreadful, but why were the Scottish Government not consulted, as Gibraltar was, before the Prime Minister went to Cabinet yesterday?

The price that Scotland would be forced to pay is far too high, with lost jobs, household incomes slashed and our NHS under threat. Now is the time to get realistic and put sensible options back on the table, such as remaining in the single market—the only credible compromise, for which the SNP has consistently made the case. This deal is dead in the water. It is now clear that there is not a majority for this deal or a no deal. The Prime Minister must go back to Brussels, extend article 50 and tell Brussels that we must remain in the single market and the customs union. Anything else will lead to economic chaos and crisis. Prime Minister, do the right thing and we will work with you. Stop the clock and go back to Brussels.

The Prime Minister: May I pick up two key points that the right hon. Gentleman made? First, he made a reference to Scotland's NHS being under threat. In fact, Scotland's NHS depends on the Scottish Government—the SNP Government—determining the money—[*Interruption.*] It is no good him pointing his finger at me. We ensure that in the NHS settlement, the Barnettised settlement means that more money comes to Scotland, and Scotland has chosen not to spend it all on its NHS. That is an SNP decision. [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. A moment ago I protected the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford), quite properly, when he was being brayed at in an unseemly manner. Let me say to Scottish National party Members that, having asked the question, they must hear the Prime Minister's reply with courtesy. Don't worry, everybody will get a chance, but the Prime Minister's responses must be heard with a basic courtesy and respect.

The Prime Minister: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I was then going to pick up the points that the right hon. Gentleman made about Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland is not staying in the single market. What is within the documents is that, in order to ensure frictionless trade across the border between Northern Ireland and

Ireland, Northern Ireland will be meeting those regulations specifically in the goods part of the *acquis*, but it is not remaining a member of the single market. He talks about Scotland being given the same treatment as Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland has a very particular set of circumstances. It is the only part of the United Kingdom that will have a land border with a country that is continuing as a member of the European Union. That is why, together with our commitments in the Belfast agreement, Northern Ireland is dealt with separately in the withdrawal agreement.

Finally, much of the right hon. Gentleman's question was a complaint that Scotland was not specifically mentioned in these documents. Scotland is not specifically mentioned; Scotland is a part of the United Kingdom.

Mr Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): May I state that I have always wished my right hon. Friend well, and my question is in this light. I have deep misgivings, on reading much of this document overnight, about the way that we will be treated with the backstop. When we read this, we realise that we are locking ourselves in to an arrangement from which we seem unable, therefore, to have the sovereign right to withdraw. That seems to me to be the biggest single issue here, which strips away the thing that we said when we wanted a vote to leave, which was that we took back control. I say to my right hon. Friend that my concern is that we have the sovereign right when we want to leave the UN; we have the sovereign right when we want to leave NATO; we have even the sovereign right when we want to leave the EU; but we do not have the sovereign right to leave this arrangement.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend says that the references to the backstop raise some difficult issues. I fully accept that they raise some difficult issues. I fully accept that, across the House, there are concerns in relation to the backstop—indeed, I share some of those concerns. These have not been easy decisions to take. It has been necessary, as I explained, and it would be necessary in any deal that we struck for our future partnership with the European Union, to agree a withdrawal agreement. We wanted to commit to ensure that we delivered no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland, and it has been clear that that withdrawal agreement needed to include this insurance policy.

My right hon. Friend talks about being held in the backstop. First, the backstop is not necessarily what will happen because we want to ensure that the future relationship is in place before the backstop is necessary. Secondly, in the circumstance that a temporary interim period was needed before the future relationship came into place, we would be able to choose a preference between the backstop and the extension of the implementation period. There are pros and cons on both sides of the argument and there will be Members who believe that one is better than the other.

There is a mechanism for coming out of the protocol if the backstop is in place. My right hon. Friend is right: that mechanism does require mutual consent. It is for both sides to agree that—I make no bones about that. However, it enables the backstop to be replaced in a number of circumstances, first and crucially if the future relationship supersedes it. Originally, that was the only

point at which it could be superseded; now, alternative arrangements could replace it. But I repeat what I have always said: it is my intention to work to ensure that such an arrangement is not necessary and we are able to go into our future relationship when we come out of the implementation period.

Sir Vince Cable (Twickenham) (LD): The Prime Minister rightly asserts that there are two alternatives to her plan: no deal and no Brexit. The Government are making considerable investment in contingency planning for no deal. What contingency planning is she doing for no Brexit, including, for example, advising the Commission that article 50 may have to be withdrawn, and she herself preparing for the fact—however much she hates it—that the House may instruct her to carry out a people's vote?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman asks what plans we are making for no Brexit. We are making no plans for no Brexit, because this Government are going to deliver on the vote of the British people.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): If we took the best part of £39 billion over the next couple of years and spent it on public services and tax cuts, would that not be a wonderful boost to our economy and the public mood, and would it not be a better way of spending the money than buying 21 months—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. This is extremely discourteous. The right hon. Gentleman has a right to be heard without being shouted down while he is speaking. I invite him to begin his question again and to deliver it in full.

John Redwood: Mr Speaker, I was saying, would it not be a wonderful boost to our economy and our public services if we spent that money on ourselves, rather than on 21 months of delay, massive business uncertainty and something that would sour the political and the public mood for the whole period?

The Prime Minister: As I said at a very early stage of the negotiations, the United Kingdom is a country that meets its legal obligations. That says a great deal about the sort of country we are. There are legal obligations. As I said in my statement, the sum of money my right hon. Friend refers to is considerably less than the European Union was originally proposing we would be required to pay as part of the financial settlement. But I remain firmly of the view that we as a country should ensure that we continue to meet our legal obligations, and we will do so.

Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): I could stand here today and take the Prime Minister through the list of promises and pledges that she made to this House, and to us privately, about the future of Northern Ireland in the future relationship with the EU, but I fear it would be a waste of time, since she clearly does not listen.

This House and every Member in it now has a clear choice. The House has been left in a position where the choice is subjection to the rules and laws of others who may not have our interests at heart. In terms of Northern Ireland and our precious Union, five who have resigned

[Nigel Dodds]

today have all talked about the threat to the integrity of the Union. I congratulate them on and praise them for what they have said and done, and their strong actions.

As has just been said, this is £39 billion for nothing. The choice is now clear: we stand up for the United Kingdom—the whole United Kingdom and the integrity of the United Kingdom—or we vote for a vassal state, with the break-up of the United Kingdom. That is the choice.

The Prime Minister: I will respond to the right hon. Gentleman. He is right that he and I have had many discussions on this issue, and I hope that we will continue to be able to have many discussions on this issue. We have ensured throughout the negotiations that the border in Northern Ireland has been one of the key issues that we have been addressing.

The right hon. Gentleman refers to the commitments I made in terms of Northern Ireland and the future relationship. Those commitments remain absolutely. We are looking to ensure that we have the frictionless trade across borders that will enable us to not only deliver on our commitment for Northern Ireland, but ensure that we have frictionless trade between the United Kingdom and the whole of the rest of the European Union. Many aspects of the deal that we have agreed actually ensure that we are preserving the integrity of the United Kingdom.

There has been significant focus on the question of the backstop. As I say, the backstop is something that neither side—neither the United Kingdom, nor the European Union—wishes to ever see being exercised. Indeed, as I have said, in circumstances where there needs to be a period before the future relationship is introduced, there are alternative routes that can be taken.

If the right hon. Gentleman says to me that he is concerned that we have not considered Northern Ireland throughout this process—

Nigel Dodds *indicated dissent.*

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for saying that he has not said that, because I have remained committed to delivering on three things for Northern Ireland: no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland; for us to continue to maintain and respond to our obligations under the Belfast agreement; and to ensure that we protect the integrity of the United Kingdom.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): Nobody but nobody can doubt the Prime Minister's absolute commitment and dedication to doing her duty and trying to deliver on the result of the EU referendum, but the harsh, cruel truth is that this is not the promised deal. The reason why the people of this country are so fed up is that they have been made so many promises, none of which has been delivered upon, because they cannot be delivered upon.

I agree with the Prime Minister that we face three choices: we either accept this agreement, for which I respectfully suggest that there is now no majority; we have no deal, which would be profoundly irresponsible and catastrophic for our country; or we have no Brexit

and remain in the European Union—the best deal that we have with the European Union. On that basis, will she at least undertake today not to rule out taking this back to the British people and having a people's vote?

The Prime Minister: I am afraid, on that particular issue, that I will disappoint my right hon. Friend. I am not going to change the position I have taken in this House and, indeed, more widely. I believe that it is the duty of Members of this Parliament to ensure that we deliver on the choice that was made by the British people—a choice that this Parliament overwhelmingly decided to give to them. That means that we will not be taking the option that she said of remaining in the European Union, but will indeed be leaving the European Union, and that will happen on 29 March next year.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): The Prime Minister has once again told the House that we will be leaving the customs union, but the truth is that we will be remaining in a customs union, both in the transition and in the backstop arrangement, which can be ended only with the agreement of the EU. The truth is also that the only way to protect jobs, investment and an open border in Northern Ireland in the long term is to remain within it. Will the Prime Minister now look the British people in the eye and admit that remaining in a customs union is in our national economic interest, because without it we will be poorer as a country?

The Prime Minister: What is in our national interest is ensuring that we continue to have a good trading partnership with the European Union once we have left. That is why we have put forward a proposal, which is reflected in the outline political declaration, for a free trade area in goods. It is why we have also put forward a proposal that would ensure the frictionless trade of goods across the border. The right hon. Gentleman and I disagree. A customs union is not the only way to ensure that we continue to have a good trading relationship with the European Union. We have put forward a proposal that is reflected in the outline political declaration to achieve that, while also ensuring that we are able to take advantage of operating an independent trade policy.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): These 585 pages are a testament to broken promises, failed negotiations and abject capitulation to the EU. Does my right hon. Friend understand that they represent a list of failures—on Northern Ireland, on ECJ issues, on indefinite extension of time, on customs, on full independence of trade and of fisheries and, above all, on our truly leaving the EU, because it will control our laws? Furthermore, there have been some very serious breaches of ministerial responsibilities, the ministerial code and collective responsibility.

The Prime Minister: What we are looking at here is a withdrawal agreement that determines the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union and a declaration that identifies the scope and structure of our future relationship. Our future relationship is one that will not see the European Union controlling our laws because, in those areas where we choose to align with the European Union, it will be for this Parliament to decide that, and that decision will therefore be taken here by the United Kingdom. There will not be European

Court of Justice jurisdiction in the United Kingdom. That is what we have negotiated in the outline political declaration for our future relationship.

I recognise my hon. Friend as one of the Members of this House who has campaigned on this issue probably since the day—maybe even since before—he came into this House. He has continued to campaign on this issue with a passion, and I recognise the concerns that he has expressed. As Prime Minister and as a Government, it is our duty to ensure that we put together a deal that not only respects the vote of the British people—it does, in the ways that I have said, and it also ends free movement—but does so in a way that protects jobs. That is why I believe it is important not only that we take back control in the areas mentioned, but that we maintain a good trading relationship with the European Union, as well as having good trading relationships elsewhere. That is in our economic interest and in our national interest, and that is what we will deliver.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): The political declaration includes passenger name records and the Prüm fingerprint database, but makes no reference to the crucial Schengen Information System II criminal database, which we check 500 million times a year, or to a replica European arrest warrant, and that is at a time when cross-border crime and security threats are at their highest ever level. The Prime Minister knows that these measures save lives, stop criminals and stop terrorists, so how can she of all people say, with her head and her heart, that this public safety downgrade is in the national interest?

The Prime Minister: First, of course, there is reference to us agreeing expeditious, swift and effective arrangements to enable the United Kingdom and member states to extradite suspected and convicted persons effectively and expeditiously. That will be part of the measure, and the instrument that is used will be part of further negotiations that will take place. The right hon. Lady is right to say that SIS II is important to us. There are two further areas of exchange of information that I and the Home Secretary believe are important—SIS II and the European Criminal Records Information System—and we will take those matters forward with the European Union in our further negotiations.

Justine Greening (Putney) (Con): I greatly respect the Prime Minister's efforts in seeking to achieve an agreement, but I do not believe that this is a good deal for Britain's long-term future. She recognises that she has had to make unpalatable choices, and in reality, there are clearly three choices now ahead of our country, and they are crucial choices, especially for young people, who will have to live with them for the longest. The Prime Minister said that this is in the national interest, so why not allow people in our nation to have their say? If that was good enough before, why is it not good enough now?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) has already raised that issue, as have Opposition Members, but this House chose to ask the people of the United Kingdom whether they wished to remain in or leave the European Union. There was an overwhelming vote in Parliament to do that—*[Interruption.]* There was an overwhelming vote

in Parliament: it was about six to one, so anybody who says that it was not overwhelming is wrong. The British people exercised their vote in numbers that we have never seen before, and the result was that we should leave the European Union. With other European issues, I have seen other countries and member states of the European Union taking matters back to their populace and holding a referendum, and when the vote has gone against what the European Union wanted, there has then effectively been a second vote—a sort of “go back and think again” vote—but I do not think it is right that we should do that in this country. We gave people the choice; we should deliver on the decision they took.

Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): We have been going for about an hour now and it is quite clear that not a single right hon. or hon. Member has supported the plans that the Prime Minister has set out. It is clear that she cannot command the House of Commons on these proposals. In fact, I am almost tempted to ask Conservative Members to put their hands up if they actually support the Prime Minister on this set of proposals. *[Interruption.]* Not one. In that case, she says that remaining in the European Union is an option, so how can the British people fulfil that choice, if that is what they choose?

The Prime Minister: I apologise, because I did not quite hear the question, but I think the hon. Gentleman said that staying in the European Union was an option—

Mr Leslie: You said it.

The Prime Minister: No, I said that there was a risk of no Brexit at all, but the Government are determined to deliver on the vote that the British people took to leave the European Union.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): My right hon. Friend—and she is unquestionably honourable—said that we would leave the customs union; annex 2 says otherwise. My right hon. Friend said that she would maintain the integrity of the United Kingdom; a whole protocol says otherwise. My right hon. Friend said that we would be out of the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice; article 174 says otherwise. As what my right hon. Friend says, and what my right hon. Friend does, no longer match, should I not write to my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Sir Graham Brady)?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend refers to the articles that relate to the protocol in the withdrawal agreement. I have been absolutely clear that some difficult choices have had to be made in relation to that protocol. Those choices have been made because I believe—I strongly and firmly believe—that it is important that we ensure there is no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland. But as I have said before, and as my hon. Friend has heard me say before, it is not only our intention, but we will be working to ensure, that that protocol does not need to be put into place.

What we are negotiating, alongside that withdrawal agreement, is not something that will be of a temporary nature, but what will be a future relationship with the European Union that will last for decades to come. In that future relationship, we will no longer be a member

[*The Prime Minister*]

of the customs union. We will no longer be a member of the single market. An end to free movement will have been delivered. The integrity of the United Kingdom will have been maintained. The jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice in the United Kingdom will end, and we will come out of the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy. So I ask my hon. Friend to consider the nature of the future relationship that we will be delivering with the European Union, which does indeed deliver on the commitments I have made.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): With Northern Ireland potentially swimming in the deep end of the pool, can the Prime Minister confirm that, based on the British Government's own logic, no economic border between Wales and England would arise should my country decide to front crawl down to them?

The Prime Minister: As we look at the proposals for the trading relationship between the United Kingdom and the European Union, I am conscious of the significant trade that takes place between Ireland and Wales, and the importance that that has for the Welsh ports. If we look at the future relationship, we have made a proposal for frictionless trade that would protect the business of the Welsh ports and ensure we have that as part of the good trading relationship for the future.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): May I put it to my right hon. Friend that the majority in the country, in Parliament and in this party accept the result of the referendum?

We back my right hon. Friend in trying to get the sovereignty she has argued for, and the prospects of prosperity, security and a fruitful partnership across the channel, the North sea and across the world.

The alternatives, if we do not go through with this, are the probability of crashing out and the possibility of a Government led by the Leader of the Opposition, neither of which is a desirable alternative.

The Prime Minister: I believe, as I think my hon. Friend does, that it is important for us to move forward in not only delivering on the vote, but ensuring that we do so in a way that protects our prosperity, and people's jobs and livelihoods for the future. But more than that, there are significant opportunities for this country, once we leave the European Union, to develop that brighter future with those further trading relationships around the rest of the world, while keeping a good trading relationship with our closest partners in the EU.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): Will the Prime Minister now recognise that she made a catastrophic error when she decided to kowtow to the fantasy extremist beliefs of the Brexiteers in her own party, instead of bringing the country together? Their views are impossible to bring about, and they are now openly plotting against her after she has tried to do her best in the negotiation. Surely she now needs to listen to the fact that there is no majority in this House for the botched deal she has brought back. She should think again and see whether,

in this House, there can be a consensual way forward that leaves her Brexiteers out in the cold where they belong.

The Prime Minister: I have kowtowed to no one. The instruction I take is the instruction that was given to every Member of this House by the British people in the referendum in 2016.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): It may surprise the House, but I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry). Prime Minister, the whole House accepts that you have done your best, but the Labour party has made it plain today that it will vote against this deal. The SNP will vote against it. The Liberals will vote against it. The DUP will vote against it—our key ally in this place will vote against it. Over 80 Tory Back Benchers—well, it is 84 now, and it is going up by the hour—will vote against it. It is therefore mathematically impossible to get this deal through the House of Commons. The stark reality, Prime Minister, is that it was dead on arrival at St Tommy's before you stood up, so I plead with you to accept the political reality of the situation you now face.

The Prime Minister: I say to my right hon. Friend that I respect the fact that he obviously holds very clear views on the issue of our membership of the European Union and the sort of relationship that we should have with the European Union thereafter. We will go forward with the final negotiations towards that European Council meeting on 25 November. When a deal is brought back, it will be for Members of this House not just to look at the details of that deal, but to consider the vote of the British people and our duty to deliver on the vote of the British people. This is the deal that has been negotiated with the European Union. We have to finalise it, and the vote will come when we have a meaningful vote. It will be for Members of this House to determine how they wish to vote at that time and to remember, when they cast their vote, the importance of ensuring that we deliver on the vote of the British people.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): The Prime Minister will be aware that the main financial backer of Brexit, Mr Arron Banks, is now under criminal investigation by the National Crime Agency because of serious doubts about the true source of the money he spent on the leave campaign. Did the Prime Minister, when she was Home Secretary in 2016, decline a request from the security services for Mr Banks to be investigated?

The Prime Minister: I say to the right hon. Gentleman that of course we do not comment in this House on individual criminal investigations that take place.

Nicky Morgan (Loughborough) (Con): There are many ironies in this whole Brexit process. One of them, as we just heard, is that colleagues on the Government Benches are going to use a parliamentary vote that 11 of us voted for last December and for which we received a torrent of abuse, accusations of treachery and betrayal, and threats of deselection—but as we have heard so many times, we are where we are. I pay tribute to the fact that the Prime Minister did get agreement in Cabinet. Can she reassure us that regardless of however many ministerial resignations there are between now and that

vote, the agreement will come to Parliament and Parliament will have its say, and that she is clear that voting for that agreement is in the national interest?

The Prime Minister: I can give my right hon. Friend the assurance that obviously we have the step of the European Union Council in finalising the deal, but a deal, when finalised, will indeed be brought to Parliament. As I suggested earlier, it will be for every Member of this House to determine their vote in the national interest.

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): The Prime Minister has carried out her mission on this with no small sense of duty, but it has been a failure, and it has turned out to be a humiliation. This was sold to the people as taking back control, but the promises of the right-wing nationalists who drove this have been shown to have turned to dust. Instead, we are being asked to sign over control of vast swathes of our economy with no say over them while paying tens of billions for the privilege. Is it not the case that far from taking back control, this is the biggest voluntary surrender of sovereignty in living memory, and that it is time to think again?

The Prime Minister: My answer to the right hon. Gentleman's question is no. He referred to the £39 billion, which, of course, was the financial settlement that is in the withdrawal agreement, which is part of the overall package of the withdrawal agreement and the future relationship. The future relationship that we are negotiating with the European Union is designed—and the outline political declaration makes this clear—to deliver on exactly the issues that mattered to the British people when they voted for Brexit. Of course, as I have said many times in the House, nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): This backstop is completely intolerable, and I feel confident that even in the unlikely event that legislation for it reaches the House, it will be ferociously opposed. Will my right hon. Friend therefore accept that this deal could well be a choice by the Government to have no deal imposed on them at the last minute, and will she therefore trigger all the implementation of no-deal contingencies now?

The Prime Minister: As I indicated in response to an earlier question, we will be continuing the no-deal preparations, because I am conscious that we have further stages in relation to this process: the European Council, and, of course, bringing this matter back to the House—and, as my hon. Friend has recognised, that is not just the meaningful vote, but the legislation that must then go through. As I said earlier, recognising that we have that European Council, and that meaningful vote to take place in the House, we will be continuing our no-deal preparations.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): While it might be tempting to watch the much vaunted Tory Brexit festival, this is deeply serious stuff. The Prime Minister knows that according to her Treasury's own analysis, every single one of her plans means people losing their jobs. So will she look at the plan which means our losing the least number of jobs, which is the

least damaging, and which may, unlike her plan, win support across the House—the plan to remain part of the customs union and the single market?

The Prime Minister: We will be leaving the customs union and leaving the single market.

Amber Rudd (Hastings and Rye) (Con): Whether we voted remain or leave, whether we sit on this side of the House or the other, we know that millions of people voted for Brexit because they were anxious about the futures, about their children and about their families. Away from the Westminster bubble, we must remember to consider those vast communities when we consider the outcomes today. We know that it is no deal that would be most damaging to them.

May I ask the Prime Minister what the response has been from the business councils that she set up—those major employers in the country that will protect those jobs?

The Prime Minister: Let me first thank my right hon. Friend for focusing people's sights on people outside the Chamber, because they are the ones we must consider when we are looking at our decisions in relation to this deal when it comes forward.

A number of quotes have come from industry about the deal. It has been said, for example, that "it delivers a clear path ahead that business so desperately needs"

The Federation of Small Businesses has said that it "brings with it some certainty that our small businesses have craved."

Businesses out there have been looking for the certainty that a deal will bring. They have also been concerned that we focus on that free trade area and on that frictionless trade across borders, which is, of course, exactly what the Government have done.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Ind): Can the Prime Minister guarantee to the House that at the end of March we will continue to have frictionless supply chains, and that at the end of this process we will be in control of our borders, we will have brought back all the judicial powers that we have surrendered, and we will be free from the European Court's jurisdictions?

The Prime Minister: I can say to the right hon. Gentleman that the future relationship we are negotiating with the European Union absolutely delivers on the points that he made about no jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice, and taking back control of our borders so that free movement is ended. We have also based the concept of the free trade area on the need for that frictionless trade in goods, to ensure that the people whose jobs depend on those supply chains do not see those jobs go, and that not only are we able to retain those jobs, but, with the other trade agreements that we are able to bring forward once we are outside the European Union, we can enhance the economy and create more jobs in this country.

Sir Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): May I congratulate the Prime Minister on her exceptional efforts to honour the result of the referendum and to achieve a deal with the EU under the most difficult and

[*Sir Nicholas Soames*]

demanding circumstances? Will she elaborate on the scale and breadth of the future partnerships agreed on security and defence?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to do that for my right hon. Friend. There are two areas in relation to security. One, of course, is internal security on which I have answered a number of questions, and where we intend to maintain co-operation in a number of areas where we are currently working very closely with our European partners. The other is external security and defence; we will have an independent foreign policy—it will be for us to make decisions—but what we have negotiated, and is set out in the outline political declaration, is an ability for the UK, where it makes sense to do so, to work with our European partners on matters of security and defence, and on issues like the imposition of sanctions where it makes sense for those sanctions to be Europe-wide rather than simply to cover the EU, and for the UK to be part of them. We will have our independent ability to deliver on sanctions, but we will co-operate with our partners in the EU. That retains our independence but also ensures that we are able to act at all times in the best interests of the UK and of maintaining our security and defence.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): The Prime Minister knows that her deal is dead and that no deal would be a disaster, so we risk chaos, job losses, environmental rules torn up, the NHS in crisis. That was never the will of the people; they did not vote for that. This is not a parlour game; it is about real people's real lives, and those risks can only be addressed if we put aside party politics. So I appeal to the Prime Minister again: why will she not give the people of this country a vote—a people's vote—on where this country goes next?

The Prime Minister: I could refer the hon. Lady to answers I have given earlier, but let me repeat my answer: this Parliament gave the people a vote, the people voted to leave, and we will deliver on the people's vote.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): With respect to my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), I believe these issues are so complex that one should not deal with them on a personal basis, but will the Prime Minister help me in my loyalty by answering my question? What if the Brexit Secretary is right: what if his devastating resignation letter is correct and we are likely, or possibly, going to be locked permanently in a backstop arrangement? What if, therefore, she loses this vote in Parliament, which is very likely: can she promise me that, whatever happens in this vote, she will deliver Brexit at the end of March?

The Prime Minister: First, we will be leaving the EU on 29 March 2019; that is a set date and I am determined that we will deliver on that whatever happens in between. On the backstop question, as I have said, neither side wants the backstop arrangement to be operated, but if it was, it is no more than a temporary construct. There are various aspects to this, and I will draw my hon. Friend's attention to one or two of them. First, it is not possible on the legal basis of article 50, under which

this withdrawal agreement is set, for it to set a permanent relationship for the future. That is explicitly referred to in the withdrawal agreement: it does not establish a permanent relationship. That is inherent in the operation of the article 50 legal base. I also say to my hon. Friend that one of the things we have got removed from this protocol is the idea that was there at one stage that if we had moved on to the future relationship and the British Government chose to change that future relationship, the backstop could be reinserted; it cannot be—once it is superseded, it cannot be revived.

Phil Wilson (Sedgefield) (Lab): I congratulate the Prime Minister on proving yet again that we cannot square the wheel. Can she say, hand on heart, whether she believes that what she has negotiated is better than the deal we have now?

The Prime Minister: I firmly believe that this country's best days are ahead of us. We will get a good deal with the European Union and take advantage of our independence outside the EU with our trade deals around the rest of the world.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): My own constituency, like the rest of the country, is deeply divided today. Does my right hon. Friend agree that there was always going to be a really difficult moment when the theory of a perfect Brexit met the cold reality of hard choices and compromise? Does she agree that this is absolutely not the moment to walk away from our responsibilities to govern and to provide this country with leadership at this difficult time?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I do agree with my right hon. Friend. This is a complex negotiation, and it does require difficult choices to be made. The challenge for all of us in this House is to make those choices not according to what we wish the world could be like but according to the reality of the world that we see, and to make those choices pragmatically and in the interests of the British people.

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): The Prime Minister insists that this deal is in the national interest, but specifically on the economy, the agreement will ensure that we have no say in the rules that govern how we trade, it does not include services as part of free and frictionless trade, and it offers only the illusion of future trade deals. Given all this, does the Treasury believe that we will grow faster and create more jobs under the negotiated agreement or under our current relationship with the European Union?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady refers to the withdrawal agreement. What is important in terms of the relationship that will persist for decades between this country and the European Union is the future partnership that we negotiate with the EU. As we have said, the outline political declaration is based on the concept of a free trade area and on ensuring that we can continue to have that good trade relationship. I can assure her, as I have assured hon. Members across the House before, that when the meaningful vote is before this House, Members will have the appropriate analysis to inform them in coming to their decision.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): It will be blindingly obvious to the entire country that the Prime Minister's deal cannot pass this House. People will find it unforgivable that we are running out of road and that in 134 days we will be crashing out of the European Union with no deal and no transition, with catastrophic consequences for all the communities that we represent in this House. May I urge her to think again about whether at this stage we should go back to the people and present them with the options, rather than just stumbling on regardless into something that will have such profound implications for all of our lives?

The Prime Minister: The nature of Brexit and our future relationship with the European Union will be a matter that will come before this House in the vote that the House will take. Members of the House will have various issues to consider when they take that vote. I say to my hon. Friend, as I have said to other hon. and right hon. Members, that I firmly believe that, having given the choice as to whether we should leave the EU to the British people, it is right and proper, and indeed our duty as a Parliament and a Government, to deliver on that vote.

Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab): We now know that during the transition, which may well have to be extended, we in the UK will give up our say over the rules that govern large parts of our economy, and that if the backstop comes into play, we will not unilaterally be able to leave it. How is giving up our current say and influence for no say and influence taking back control?

The Prime Minister: What the hon. Lady describes in terms of the transition period was clear. I answered questions on it in the House back in March when the European Council agreed on the concept of the transition period. That was absolutely clear. The point of the transition period is to move towards the future relationship, and the future relationship is one in which we will have the ability to determine our position. Yes, we put forward a proposal in the White Paper which had frictionless trade and a common rulebook, but alongside that common rulebook was a parliamentary lock on determining whether or not this country would accept any changes in those rules.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): The Government are preparing to give £39 billion to the EU. There is no legal obligation to do so, and we are going to get nothing in return. That is £60 million for each and every constituency in this country. If I had £60 million in Wellingborough, I would have the Isham bypass, I would have our roads mended properly, I would have an urgent care centre at the Isebrook Hospital and I would have millions of pounds over. Please, Prime Minister, use that money in this country—do not give it to the EU.

The Prime Minister: The premise of my hon. Friend's question was that there was no legal obligation for us to pay anything to the European Union. I have to say that I believe that is not the case; I believe there are legal obligations for this country in relation to the financial settlement with the European Union. As I said earlier, I believe that we are a country that abides by our legal obligations.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): This deal is not in the national interest, and the Prime Minister knows that. It leaves us less secure, less influential and more isolated. However, can the Prime Minister set out what scenarios would lead to no Brexit at all? As far as I can tell, there are only two: first, she calls a general election, which I assume she will not be doing, or, secondly, she allows a people's vote. Which of those two is it going to be?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman described what he thinks the position will be for the United Kingdom if we go ahead with this deal. He talks about our being more isolated; that will not be the case. The United Kingdom will be continuing to play its role on the world stage in a whole variety of organisations that we will be involved in, but also in the way in which we negotiate trade deals with the rest of the world and the way in which we support and co-operate with parts of the rest of the world on matters such as security and defence. There is no sense in which this United Kingdom is going to be isolated when we leave the European Union.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): For many months, this House was assured that it would have the full future framework before it when it was voting on the withdrawal agreement. I was encouraged to hear the Prime Minister say that further detail will emerge, as that will be critical for jobs and employment in my constituency. Can the Prime Minister outline when we will see that full future framework?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend because this gives me an opportunity to set out the process that will be followed. We will now be entering into further intense negotiations with the European Union, such that a full future framework can be delivered to the European Council as part of the overall package. That will then, of course, be published and available for Members of this House to see. I am conscious that it is important—while we cannot agree legal text on the future relationship, because we cannot do that until we have left the European Union—that we have sufficient detail in that future framework so that Members are able to have confidence in the future relationship with the European Union when they come to vote in the meaningful vote.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I have known the Prime Minister all her parliamentary career. I do not always agree with her, but I know her to be a woman of courage. I feel sorry for her this morning—let down by the disloyalty of so many of her colleagues. I also feel sorry for her because we have given her an impossible task. We know increasingly, in this country and in this House, that there is no deal better than staying in the European Union, and it is time that we did something to recognise that, be courageous and take this back to the people.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman will not be surprised that the answer I give him, despite the fact that we have known each other throughout my career in this House, will be no different from that I have given to other right hon. and hon. Members in relation to taking the vote back the people. It was a decision of this

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Parliament by six to one that the people should have that choice, and they exercised their vote, as I said earlier, in numbers that we have not seen before. It is only right and proper that this Parliament—this Government—delivers on that vote.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Can the Prime Minister describe any surer way of frustrating the referendum result, and ultimately remaining in the European Union, than to accept a Hotel California Brexit deal, which ensures that we can never truly leave the EU, with all its manipulative, entangling and undemocratic practices?

The Prime Minister: We are leaving the European Union on 29 March 2019. We are negotiating a future relationship with the European Union that will, indeed, deliver on the vote of the British people in the referendum by bringing an end to free movement and an end to the jurisdiction of the Court of Justice of the European Union, and by coming out of the common agricultural policy and out of the common fisheries policy. These are issues to which I have previously referred, and we will be leaving on 29 March 2019.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): The withdrawal agreement that the Prime Minister is presenting to us today is not in the national interest, and it is very clear that it will not make us better off. She may not be aware that an overnight YouGov poll shows that 63% of the British public are against this deal, with 64% favouring a people's vote if the deal is rejected by this House, and it is very clear from the contributions this morning that that is what will happen. Will she now listen to the millions of people across our country and give them a say on what Brexit will actually mean, rather than on the false promises on which the vote to leave was predicated?

The Prime Minister: The documents were actually published yesterday evening: 500 pages of the withdrawal agreement, plus the outline political declaration and the joint statement. Once again, the hon. Lady's assumption is that we should, in some sense, try to go back on the vote of the British people. I believe absolutely that we should not and that we should ensure that we do leave the European Union. That is the decision that was taken by the British people, and that is the decision we will deliver on.

Dr Phillip Lee (Bracknell) (Con): When I resigned from the Government in June, I called for the suspension of article 50 because I feared this likely parliamentary impasse. The Prime Minister is a thoroughly decent person who has public service running through her veins. With that in mind, and with an eye on the importance of the responsibility of government, will she outline the legal, legislative and political requirements for suspending article 50 or, indeed, revoking it?

The Prime Minister: As I think my hon. Friend knows, there has been a case before the courts on the issue of the extension of article 50. The Government's position is clear: we will not extend article 50.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Articles 14, 87, 89, 158 and 174 of this agreement mean that the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice will continue to reign supreme across the UK, for four years after the transition period in some respects, for eight years after the transition period in other respects and indefinitely in the case of Northern Ireland. In what respects has the Prime Minister's red line on the European Court of Justice survived this agreement?

The Prime Minister: I was very clear when we brought back the agreement in the December 2017 joint report that, in relation to citizens' rights for example, there would continue to be an ability for the interpretation of the European Court of Justice in relation to European Union law on those rights to be considered for a period of time beyond the end of the transition period and that it would then cease.

It is not the case that Northern Ireland will be indefinitely under the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice. The future relationship that we are negotiating with the European Union will ensure that the United Kingdom is removed from the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice. If the hon. and learned Lady looks at the proposed governance arrangements, she will see that we are very clear that the court of one party cannot determine matters in relation to another party.

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): My right hon. Friend has repeated today that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, so can she explain why there is nothing in the withdrawal agreement that makes the withdrawal agreement legally contingent upon the implementation and agreement of a legal relationship for the future?

The Prime Minister: There are, indeed, clauses that link the withdrawal agreement to the future relationship. The legal term "best endeavours" is used in a number of places in relation to this matter to ensure that that future relationship is in place. Obviously, as I said earlier, we are still to negotiate further details in relation to that future relationship, and it is the determination of both sides, as expressed in these documents, that that future relationship should be capable of being put into place at the end of the transition period.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab): The Prime Minister made a very dignified statement in difficult circumstances, but does she realise that when people outside this House read these hundreds of pages of Euro-speak, they will realise that, in a way, we are being sold out? We have been sold out by our negotiators, who have allowed the EU to take the lead. Will she not accept that at this stage not only are we all being collectively sold out, but the people of Northern Ireland are being sold out absolutely?

The Prime Minister: I do not agree with the hon. Lady in relation to the suggestion that in some sense the European Commission and the European Union have given nothing away to the UK during these negotiations. These have been tough negotiations; this is a complex matter. For example, as I referred to in my statement, the EU has been clear for some time that the choice we had in our future relationship was a binary one between the Norway model or the Canada model, but it has now

accepted that that is not the case and there is a bespoke agreement for the United Kingdom. They said we could not share security capabilities, but, as is clear in the outline political declaration, we do have access to certain security capabilities. They said we could not preserve the invisible border between Northern Ireland and Ireland without splitting the UK's customs territories—that is now no longer the case. These are all issues that our negotiators have negotiated in the interests of the United Kingdom.

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): The boost to our economy that was referred to earlier and the necessary protection for our constituents' jobs can occur only if UK industry has a frictionless trade area and deep regulatory co-operation. But UK financial services and UK industry also need certainty, so will my right hon. Friend confirm to the House that the future political framework will contain a common rulebook and a deep customs arrangement?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend has seen, the outline political declaration makes reference to the free trade area that we will be negotiating with the European Union and, indeed, to the need to ensure that we have those good arrangements across our border. As was outlined in the joint statement that accompanied the outline political declaration, there are two areas, in particular, where further negotiation is continuing. One of them is this issue of the trade relationship. The other is, as I indicated in my response to the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), aspects of the security relationship that we are continuing to negotiate. But we continue to work on the basis that my hon. Friend has set out of the importance of that frictionless trade across borders.

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): The right hon. Lady has been a professional colleague for more than 20 years, and I personally saw how hard she worked during the 2011 riots. This whole House recognises the dedication and hard work she has put into this 585-page agreement. However, because of her huge parliamentary experience, she will recognise that this agreement does not command a majority in this House and that in the 10 days to follow before the EU signs off this agreement she is likely to face challenges within her own party. In those circumstances, in our constitutional arrangement, when politics is broken, one can only put the question back to the British people.

The Prime Minister: I think that having had the vote in 2016, the British people will look at this Chamber, this House and this Parliament and say what people say to me when I go to talk to them on the doorsteps, which is, "Actually, we have taken the decision to leave. Just get on with it. Just deliver."

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): Prime Minister, you said that it would be our choice whether we go into an implementation period or a backstop if the agreement cannot be reached. But this document says that the protocol gives the UK a choice either to implement the backstop or to seek an extension of the implementation period, which it does by requesting that. How is that our choice and not theirs?

The Prime Minister: It is our choice on which of those we wish to do. My hon. Friend is absolutely right that the extension of the implementation period needs agreement with the EU, and that is why I have described this as a choice. It is for us to say whether we wish the backstop or the implementation period to be extended, but she is absolutely right that the extension would be a matter for negotiation with the EU. If we get to that point, there would be arguments on both sides about which would be preferable for the UK, just as there would be arguments on both sides within the EU, because the backstop is not a situation the EU wants either.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): I have a great deal of sympathy for the Prime Minister—she has walked the Via Dolorosa set out for her by her own party—but the false choice she is offering this place is between a deal that is dead before it has even been read by most people in this House and no deal at all. Is it not now time for the British people to take back control from this place and for her to extend article 50 and let the people decide in a people's vote?

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the answers I have given previously to that question.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): My right hon. Friend tells the House that we will leave the EU at the end of March 2019, but we have also heard from her and hon. Members on both sides of the House that that is not the case. With due respect, under this deal we will have no unilateral way to leave and, worse still, there will be no incentive for the EU to let us go.

The Prime Minister: We will be leaving the EU on 29 March 2019. After that date, we will no longer be a member of the EU. Yes, we have agreed in the transition period that we will continue to operate with the EU very much as we do today, and that is to avoid a cliff edge for business on 29 March and to ensure that business can adapt to the changes in our future relationship. I repeat that from the 29 March 2019 we will no longer be a member of the EU.

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): During the course of yesterday, and excluding the Cabinet, can the Prime Minister tell the House which organisations and individuals were informed and briefed on the proposed deal, in which order they were briefed and what hierarchy was applied?

The Prime Minister: Members of the Cabinet came together yesterday to look at the withdrawal agreement and the outline political declaration. The information was made available to them once the text had been finalised. Those negotiations carried on quite late, and the Cabinet was able to take its decision on the basis of the proper papers.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Why did the Prime Minister say that rejecting the deal risked no Brexit? Can she quantify that risk and say how it might occur?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend will be aware that there may be those in the House, as we have heard from several Opposition Members, who wish to

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ensure we do not leave the EU. I believe that it is important that we do leave the EU and that we do so on the basis of a good future relationship with the EU.

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): It is obvious that the Prime Minister does not command a majority in the House. People who support leave know the deal gives power to the EU instead of bringing it back, and people who support remain know it is not as good as the one we have. We have got to this position because she has been playing games with Brexit from the beginning, including by calling a general election in the middle of the negotiation period. Will she now do the right thing, go back to the people and let them say whether the deal is good enough? It would not be a rerun of the referendum. The first was based on promises; this one would be based on facts.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave earlier.

Nick Herbert (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): Is there not a danger that in getting hung up on issues such as the backstop, which although immensely important is something that all sides wish to avoid, or the transition period, which is by definition temporary, we lose sight of the really important issue, which is the future relationship with the EU? That is what we should be focusing on and discussing, and that is what our constituents expect us to deliver. Is it not the case that however they voted in the referendum, the vast majority of Members of this House voted to trigger article 50, and the public expect us to deliver on our promise? Members of the Government Benches in particular should be careful what they wish for in making it harder to move to that position.

The Prime Minister: I support my right hon. Friend's comments. He is absolutely right. There has of course been a lot of focus on the backstop, and I recognise why, because there are genuine concerns about its operation. As he says, others have referred to the transition or implementation period. What will actually determine our relationship with the European Union for decades ahead, though, is the future relationship that we negotiate with the European Union. That is what will determine the futures of my right hon. Friend's constituents, of my constituents and of people right across the whole United Kingdom.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I take this opportunity to inform the House that we have now had 50 questions from Back Benchers, so may I please appeal to colleagues to put short and pointed questions, as exemplified by the right hon. Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne)?

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): No deal would have catastrophic consequences for UK manufacturing; this deal will not pass Parliament. Why does the Prime Minister persist in seeking to achieve the unachievable? With every day of delay, we are one step

closer to the cliff. To go over that cliff without an agreement would be the ultimate betrayal of the British national interest.

The Prime Minister: When the deal comes to the House, Members will of course have a choice as to whether to accept it. I understand that motor manufacturers have welcomed the deal; they recognise that it is a step forward in ensuring that we can deliver on what matters for them in the future relationship and trading partnership with the EU.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): Many of the questions asked by colleagues today would be addressed if there were more detail on the future relationship, but of course it has been the EU negotiators, not the British negotiators, who have refused to discuss the future relationship before the withdrawal agreement is agreed, so I thank the Prime Minister for the outline of the future relationship. Will she clarify that we will get more detail on that future relationship before the critical vote in this House?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I am very happy to confirm that for my hon. Friend. She refers to the position of the EU negotiators; in fact, I think that many feel that they have been looking more at the future relationship than they had expected. We will ensure that more detail is available for Members of this House before the meaningful vote.

Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab): The Prime Minister has said that the country faces three choices: no Brexit; any agreement that she is able to finalise with the EU and get through this House; and no deal. She has also just said that we will get an economic analysis—an impact assessment. Will she undertake to ensure that that impact assessment includes a comparison of the current deal we have—no Brexit—and the one that she proposes to put to a meaningful vote in this House? To withhold that from the House would be unacceptable.

The Prime Minister: We will ensure, in advance of the time at which people take their decision in relation to the meaningful vote, that proper analysis is available to enable people to make a judgment between the deal that is being proposed and alternative arrangements.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): The Prime Minister is well known for her dancing; sadly, having seen the withdrawal agreement, it is now clear whose tune she has been dancing to. My right hon. Friend campaigned for remain and she voted for remain. Surely it is now in the national interest for her to leave, perhaps following a short transition period.

The Prime Minister: I note the way my hon. Friend carefully tried to weave into his question various references to matters that are perhaps not entirely relevant to the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration. Every Member of this House will have a decision to take when the deal is brought back. I believe it is important that we have a deal that delivers on the vote of the British people, which I believe the deal does, but in a way that protects jobs, people's security and, of course, the integrity of our United Kingdom.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): Today is truly a sad day for our country: the Government is collapsing while we are riddled with food banks, child poverty rises and 30% of workers are in hardship jobs. What from this three-page wish list does the Prime Minister suggest will change this country's fortunes for the better?

The Prime Minister: First, absolute poverty is in fact at a low, and we have seen in the figures that came out earlier this week that real wages have been growing faster recently than at any time in the past decade, so the hon. Lady's portrayal of this country is not fair. She asks what will ensure and improve the future of the British people; well, first of all, getting a good trade deal with the European Union is important, and that is what we are working towards—that is what the outline political declaration sets out—and we are also ensuring that we can have good trade deals around the rest of the world. I have to point out to the hon. Lady, given the Benches on which she sits, that what is necessary for all that is the good economic management that the Conservative Government have produced.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): I have no doubt that my right hon. Friend has in good faith negotiated the best deal on the withdrawal agreement that she could. It does not please Brussels, it does not please London, and it probably does not please any Member of this House; nevertheless, do we not owe it to the British people to scrutinise it carefully, together with the remaining documents that my right hon. Friend will bring back from the summit in November, to see whether it is in the best interests of the British people, rather than crashing out of the EU with no deal?

The Prime Minister: It is important that there is some further negotiation to fill out the details of the future relationship, and as my hon. Friend says, it will be important for Members of this House, when they have the meaningful vote, to consider those documents, alongside the analysis that the Government will provide, so that they have the full information to be able to take that vote and, as he says, in doing so recall the duty that I believe we have to deliver on the referendum vote.

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): It is clear that this deal is not as good as the one we currently have: it will make the country worse off. It is also clear that there is no majority in the House for the Prime Minister's deal or for no deal. She has ruled out extending article 50 or a people's vote, so what is the plan if she does not get support for her deal in the House?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady will know the process that the House has set out in relation to that matter. In praising membership of the European Union, she and a number of other Members on the Labour Benches have effectively suggested that we should set aside the vote of the British people and remain in the European Union. That would not be the right thing to do; we must deliver on the vote of the British people.

Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con): Outside in the real world, many employers and employees are depending on all of us to take responsible steps to protect their jobs. Does the Prime Minister agree with techUK,

which represents more than 1 million jobs in this country in the fast-growing tech sector, and which states that failing to achieve parliamentary approval of the withdrawal agreement would “disrupt supply chains”, “hit investment” and “lead to job losses”, and that “small and medium sized businesses would be worst affected”?

The Prime Minister: When the time comes for Members of this House to vote in the meaningful vote and to consider the deal that is before them, they will indeed, as I said earlier, need not only to recall the duty to deliver on the vote of the British people but to look very closely at the implications of the vote that they cast. It is the jobs and futures of our constituents that should be at the forefront of our minds.

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): Given how important immigration was for some leave voters, will the Prime Minister guarantee today that her immigration White Paper will be published and debated before the meaningful vote on the deal?

The Prime Minister: The issue of immigration was indeed important for many people during the vote. They wanted free movement to end. What we are negotiating is an end to free movement. We will publish the immigration White Paper in due course.

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): The Prime Minister has worked tirelessly over the past 18 months to achieve this draft agreement. My constituency voted for Brexit for many reasons. Chief among them was to reverse 40 years of economic decline. In her opinion, does this agreement provide the framework within which we can revive the economy in coastal towns such as Lowestoft, whether in trade, manufacturing or fishing?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I believe that it does. Crucially for fishing, we will be out of the common fisheries policy and will be able to work to enhance the fortunes of our fishing industry. Alongside this agreement, it is important to look at what the Government are doing elsewhere—for example, through our modern industrial strategy—to ensure that we are delivering an economy that works for everyone in all parts of the UK.

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): The Prime Minister has been very determined to respect the will of the people. More than 60% of my constituency in Batley and Spen voted to leave, believing that they would be taking back control, but this deal's backstop will be policed by a third party. Today, she has said that it will not be used, it will not be necessary and it will be temporary, but in order for it not to be used, we will have to pay—who knows what?—potentially massive amounts to the EU to extend the transition period. How is making my constituents and the country poorer taking back control?

The Prime Minister: The best way of ensuring that the backstop is not used is to get the future relationship—the future partnership—with the European Union in place by 1 January 2021.

Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend please confirm that, after 31 December 2020, other nations will not have access to

[Mrs Sheryll Murray]

anything other than the surplus fish stocks in British waters that the UK fleet cannot catch, even if the implementation period is extended?

The Prime Minister: We have not changed our position, which is that, as of December 2020, the UK should be an independent coastal state able to negotiate the issue of access to its waters for the following year and, obviously, for thereafter.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): The Prime Minister has been on her feet now for almost two hours. She has talked about making difficult choices. She has also said that this was not the final deal. With the pound set to have its biggest fall for two years and only seven MPs in two hours expressing any support for this deal at all, will she tell us what she expects to change to enable her to break that deadlock?

The Prime Minister: What will happen over the next few days, and before the special European Council takes place, is the final negotiation on matters relating to the future relationship. We will fill out the details and show a future relationship that will indeed be good for the UK economy.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): First, there is huge personal respect for the Prime Minister wherever Members stand on this matter.

May I urge my right hon. Friend to study evidence given to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee this week by customs experts, particularly their suggestions around facilitation and technical ways of achieving a soft border that does not require a backstop? Does she agree that the independent arbitration panel is bound to find that, if the EU does not negotiate the future arrangement with that in mind, it is likely to be found to have acted in bad faith?

The Prime Minister: Indeed, and that is the point of the “best endeavours” and “good faith” references in the document.

May I just say that this is the first opportunity that I have had in this Chamber to say a heartfelt thank you to my hon. Friend for the work that he did for the commemorations of the armistice and the centenary of the first world war? He can be truly proud of all the events that took place.

My hon. Friend referenced the issue of alternative arrangements for the border in Northern Ireland. One change that has been made recently in relation to the backstop issue, which we got into the protocol in the joint statement, is precisely the ability to look at alternative arrangements rather than just at the binary choice of the future relationship coming into place or the backstop coming into place. We have, of course, got the extension of the implementation period as an option, but what is also important is that, if the future framework is not in place, it is possible to have alternative arrangements for the border that satisfy the requirement and the desire that we all have to ensure that there is no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): At previous times of national crisis in our history, both sides of the House have come together to resolve them. The Prime

Minister has made it clear that she will not support the extension of article 50. She has said that we will be leaving the European Union regardless in March next year, and she has also ruled out a people’s vote. Is it not time that she recognised reality and, after all her prodigious efforts, stood aside for someone else who can take this country forward in a united way?

The Prime Minister: No.

Adam Holloway (Gravesham) (Con): Does the Prime Minister feel that she has listened to her officials while sidelining her Brexit Secretaries, and is she now disobeying the instruction of my constituents in Gravesham?

The Prime Minister: I say to my hon. Friend that the answer to both of his questions is no. I have worked with my Brexit Secretaries and with officials and the negotiating team throughout this process, and the deal that we are proposing does deliver on the instruction of the British people.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): As a psychologist, it is clear to me today that the Prime Minister is in denial. However pragmatically agreed this deal has been, it does not command a majority in this House. If she believes in her deal and she wants to get back control, will she put it to the people?

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the answers that I have given earlier on that question.

Mr Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con): Millions of people up and down this country and hundreds of thousands of businesses want this House to get on with it. As my right hon. Friend looks to develop the future framework, I recognise that we will remain within the EU procurement rules during the course of the implementation period. The future framework protocol refers to mutual opportunities to go beyond the WTO Government procurement agreement. Will she give some indication to the House as to whether that will include taking back control of our own procurement in this country?

The Prime Minister: Yes, we are developing a framework for our own procurement arrangements.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): In the light of the fact that a no deal would be a disaster for our nation and the high probability that the House will not pass this deal, will the Prime Minister make it her first step to extend article 50 to ensure that we do not fall off a cliff edge?

The Prime Minister: No, the Government have made it clear that we will not be extending article 50.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): The draft agreement states:

“Under no circumstances may the United Kingdom: apply to its customs territory a customs tariff which is lower than the Common Customs Tariff for any good or import from any third country”.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is a severe limitation on our sovereignty and will limit the opportunities that Brexit offers?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is talking about the circumstances in which the backstop and the UK-wide customs territory would come into place. As I said earlier, that is not a situation that either side wants to see happen. Even in circumstances where the future relationship is not in place at the end of December 2020, it is not necessarily the case that the backstop would come into place. If he looks at the future relationship, he will see that there is specific reference to independent trade policy for the United Kingdom. We are working to ensure that that is precisely what we are able to have for our trade deals around the rest of the world. That was one of the questions that we looked at when we put forward our proposals for the free trade area with the European Union, and we have gone forward confident that we will be able to make free trade deals around the rest of the world.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I agree with the Prime Minister that there are no enemies of the people and no traitors in this House, whatever the national newspapers may have said last year. Every single Member will make their own judgment, according to their conscience, as to what is in the best interests of the country. None the less, the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) was right earlier: there is not a majority in this House for what the Prime Minister is proposing.

This is a matter of time now—time is of the essence. Whichever way we go after this, there are hundreds of statutory instruments that have to be taken and a lot of legislation that has to be in place to prevent chaos. Does it not make sense to have a vote in this House now, before the Prime Minister goes to the European Council? If she wins, she has the support of Parliament. If she loses, we have to take another tack.

The Prime Minister: We will have a vote in this House on the final deal that is negotiated with the European Union Council. As I have said, although we have the outline political declaration at the moment, we will be filling that in with further detail, which will be available to Members when they come to that vote.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): The Prime Minister and I know that politics is ultimately the art of the possible. That is why I support her deal and why the City corporation and all the representatives of the financial services industry have supported it, not least because it creates, in their words, the transition that is “vital” to take forward the complex issues in our future relationships in that sector. Does she agree that anyone who seeks to thwart the deal should weigh very carefully indeed the impact not just on that key economic area, but on the rest of our economy?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. When people come to look at their decision in relation to this deal, it will be important for individual Members of this House to weigh very carefully a number of factors, and the impact of their decision not only on our financial services sector, but on the economy more widely will be one of them.

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): My constituency voted leave. I promised that we would fight for the best possible Brexit deal for my constituents—one that will protect industry. This is not it. Given that

ceramics is mentioned just once in the 585-page deal, how can we trust the Prime Minister to deliver a deal that will benefit my constituents, protect jobs and return sovereignty?

The Prime Minister: The deal that we have agreed—and in particular the future relationship that we are working on filling out the detail of—is precisely one that will be good for manufacturing industry across the United Kingdom.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): Taking back control of our borders was one of the big issues that influenced my constituents’ votes at the referendum. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that leaving the EU on the terms proposed will finally allow us to fully control our borders again?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I am happy to give that confirmation to my hon. Friend. Free movement will end. That is one of the key elements, I believe, of the vote in the referendum that we need to ensure we deliver for the British people.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): Anyone buying an insurance policy would want to know what the excess was. If the analogy for the backstop is an insurance policy, is the Prime Minister seriously suggesting that we should sign up for an insurance policy where we do not know how much the excess will cost and where we also cannot leave it without the agreement of the other party?

The Prime Minister: One of the elements of the backstop—this relates to deciding, should we be in that circumstance, whether the backstop or the extension to the implementation period would be preferable—is that in the backstop there is no financial obligation.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): It is impossible for any of us in this House to know exactly what was in our constituents’ minds when they voted to leave or remain. It was a binary choice on the ballot paper. By that logic, it is therefore absolutely impossible for everybody to get what they want. Certain compromises are necessary in the national interest, as the Prime Minister has said. Will she therefore assure us that she will exert every effort to outline the benefits of a future trade deal that will be in the national interest and protect jobs and the economy?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to give that reassurance to my hon. Friend. She is absolutely right: the nature of this negotiation is that both sides make compromises. That is what happens when two sides come together to negotiate arrangements such as this, but I am happy to assure her that we will make clear the benefits of the future trade relationship and future trade deals that we will do around the rest of the world.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): The response of the Scottish Fishermen’s Federation says:

“we have asked the Prime Minister for assurances that the establishment of a new fisheries agreement...does not imply that EU vessels will be guaranteed continued access to our waters in return for favourable trade terms.”

Can the Prime Minister give the federation that assurance? If she can, can she explain why it is not in the draft deal?

The Prime Minister: We have made it clear in the outline political declaration in relation to fishing opportunities that the United Kingdom will be an independent coastal state and that we will be ensuring that we take control of our waters. It will be the United Kingdom that will be negotiating access to United Kingdom waters.

James Cartledge (South Suffolk) (Con): Given that there is clearly unease about our inability to leave the backstop unilaterally, surely we have to discuss what credible circumstances could arise where we would wish to leave it and the EU would not wish us to. The only scenario I can see is where we had entered into trade talks with another country and were discussing, for example, lower standards. Does the Prime Minister agree that that is highly unlikely and would not be supported by the public? Although it is not impossible, the likelihood of our being in that circumstance is remote.

The Prime Minister: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend that it is highly unlikely that we would be in that circumstance. He is right, first of all, that we will not be wanting to lower our standards in any decisions we take in relation to trade deals, but also that the backstop is an uncomfortable place for the European Union. It believes that the backstop has advantages for businesses in the United Kingdom, particularly those in Northern Ireland. These are advantages that it will not want to see continuing. The European Union has an interest in this being temporary, should we be in that position, just as we do.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): The Northern Ireland protocols make it clear that Northern Ireland will stay under EU single market law and will also be economically separated from the rest of the United Kingdom. Articles 7, 9 and 12 show that, even if the EU allows the UK to leave the single market, Northern Ireland will remain under single market arrangements, and any border down the Irish sea will be subject to the willingness of the EU to allow that to be avoided. How can the Prime Minister give us an assurance that Northern Ireland will not be constitutionally separated from the United Kingdom and economically separated from GB? Or is this not a case of Northern Ireland being put on a platter and abject surrender to the EU?

The Prime Minister: No, that is not the case. Throughout this discussion and these negotiations, the interests of Northern Ireland have been one of the key issues that we have put at the forefront of our mind, because of the particular geographical circumstances of Northern Ireland and its land border with Ireland. Northern Ireland will leave the single market with the whole of the United Kingdom. There will be specific regulatory alignment, which I recognise is uncomfortable. It will be in that portion of the single market *acquis* that relates to matters that ensure that a frictionless border can take place between Ireland and Northern Ireland.

As the right hon. Gentleman will know, there are already some regulatory differences between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. There is a question in the future, which I know has raised a concern, as to whether there will be regulatory divergence between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It is possible for us, and we will make

unilateral commitments to Northern Ireland in relation to that issue—because we are talking about a temporary period—of no regulatory divergence. The checks and controls actually relate to the degree of regulatory divergence, so if there is no regulatory divergence, obviously, that has an impact on reducing the necessity for any checks and controls. Crucially, the EU wanted to say that it would determine whether a good that was produced in Birmingham could be sold in Belfast. We were very clear that the EU could not determine that in the future. It will be the UK Government who make those determinations.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): As I stand here, I think hard about what this means for my constituents—many who voted passionately to leave, but many others who are worried about the impact of leaving on their livelihoods. I thank my right hon. Friend for all the work that she is doing to reconcile those two positions in a workable Brexit. As a Kent MP, I have a particular interest in avoiding delays at the border at Dover and gridlock in Kent. Can she say more about the progress made in the future relationship plans for our trade in goods?

The Prime Minister: First, I thank my hon. Friend for her comment and recognition that, by definition, in looking at these issues, there will be compromise. Obviously, people on both sides of the argument voted in the Brexit vote. I think the overwhelming view of the British people now is that they want to see the Government getting on and delivering Brexit for the British people.

My hon. Friend asks specifically about goods. We have expressly within the outline political declaration—we will flesh this out in the fuller future framework document—put as a key element, at the forefront of our thinking, the need to ensure we have a continuing good trading relationship, with seamless transfer of goods across borders.

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): I have been very clear that my constituents voted to leave the European Union, and the only way we can do that smoothly is by leaving with a deal. However, it is clear from what has been said in the House today that the Prime Minister's deal does not have a majority. She has ruled out withdrawing article 50 and said that she will not support a second referendum, and I do not believe that a majority exists for that in this place either. But I hope that, like me, the Prime Minister realises that no deal would be a catastrophe. Will she outline her contingency plan for this deal failing and preventing a no-deal Brexit on 29 March?

The Prime Minister: The decision on the deal will come before this House in a meaningful vote, and every Member will have the opportunity to exercise their vote according to their conscience, the need to deliver for the British people, and consideration of the impact that their decision will have on their constituents' future.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): I hope that my right hon. Friend agrees that we would be extremely unwise to sacrifice the good on the altar of theological perfection. If she does agree with that principle, can she

tell me if this is a good deal for the farmers and food producers of my constituency and for the country as a whole?

The Prime Minister: It is important that in approaching the deal and the vote, hon. Members look at it in the light of the realities of the impact and the practicalities of the deal that we will put before the House. My hon. Friend asks specifically about farmers in his constituency and elsewhere. I can reassure him that I believe that this deal delivers for them in two senses. First, we will be able to come out of the common agricultural policy and develop our own policy for agriculture that meets the needs of farmers across the United Kingdom. Secondly, although people often think of manufactured goods when talking about a frictionless border, fresh produce going across borders is equally important.

Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab): The local Schaeffler plant is closing—200 jobs. Eight hundred Virgin Media job losses. Since the 2016 referendum, more jobs have been lost than have been created. It is increasingly obvious that people in my constituency and in Wales are worse off. Should not the Government respect the future wellbeing of the people by asking for a people's vote?

The Prime Minister: I have answered the question on the people's vote on a number of occasions. I refer the hon. Lady to the answer I have given previously.

The employment figures we saw earlier this week show that employment in this country is now at a record high. In recent years, including since the referendum, jobs have been created in this country.

Lee Rowley (North East Derbyshire) (Con): I have a huge amount of respect for my right hon. Friend and it gives me no happiness to say this, but nothing I have heard in the past two hours suggests that this is anything other than a bad deal. When will she realise that this is not the deal that people in places such as North East Derbyshire voted for, that they want, or that they will accept?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend will have an understanding of the reasons behind his constituents' vote. I think that, if we look across his constituency and others, we see that among the key things that people wanted to achieve from leaving the European Union was an end to free movement, and we will deliver an end to free movement; and an end to the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice, and we will deliver that as well. We will no longer be sending vast amounts of money to the European Union every year. We will come out of policies that have been of concern in this country for a long time—the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy. We will ensure that we have delivered on what I believe are the key elements of the vote that people cast. While we do that, it is right that we think of people's jobs in North East Derbyshire and elsewhere, and that is why it is important that we seek a good future trading relationship with the European Union—one that is based on a free trade area and enables manufacturing to continue to operate as it can today.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): Does the Prime Minister now accept that she inadvertently misled the nation during her now infamous Lancaster House speech, in which she appeared to offer a Utopian vision of Brexit—perhaps designed to appease both wings of her divided party—that simply cannot and never could be delivered?

The Prime Minister: All the speeches I have made and the decisions the Government have taken are compatible with the Lancaster House speech. What that speech, at its core, set out was that in the new relationship with the European Union, we had to have a new balance of rights and obligations. That is exactly what we are delivering.

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): My constituents and I welcome my right hon. Friend's repeated and consistent commitment that we will be leaving the CFP. Of course, being out of the EU means that we are out of the CFP in the same way that being in the EU—the policy of the Scottish National party and others—means being in the CFP. *[Interruption.]* You know it does. Will my right hon. Friend also commit that unfettered access to UK waters by EU fishing vessels outwith our ability to have control as an independent coastal state will not be part of any future trade agreement with the EU?

The Prime Minister: We are very clear that we will be an independent coastal state. There have been attempts to link fisheries and access to fishing waters to the trade aspect of the negotiation. We have been very clear that we will not accept that. We will be an independent coastal state so that it is the United Kingdom that determines access to UK waters.

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): Uncertainty about our future trading relationships with the EU is undermining British business and having a chilling effect on our economic growth. There is absolutely nothing in this so-called deal that dispels or resolves those issues. Will the Prime Minister recognise that, instead of negotiating with the economic kamikaze tendency in her own party, she needs to reach out to this side of the House and build a consensus, or take the issue again to the public?

The Prime Minister: The decision taken yesterday gives that certainty to business, which is why business has been welcoming the deal. Richard Walker of Iceland says:

“it delivers a clear path ahead that business so desperately needs”.

As I mentioned earlier, the FSB says it

“brings with it some certainty that our small businesses have craved.”

There are other quotes from business welcoming the fact that we have recognised the needs of manufacturing industry in putting forward our proposals for the future relationship.

Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): I commend the Prime Minister for what she has said to Members on both sides of the House who have called for a politicians' vote on a second referendum. It simply would not be appropriate

[Mr Simon Clarke]

at this time. However, it must be said that “no deal is better than a bad deal” are the words that govern my position today. I cannot support the deal. Does she appreciate that she has placed many of us in a simply impossible position, where our loyalty to her and to our party is set against our loyalty to our constituents?

The Prime Minister: I fully recognise that the issue we are dealing with raises some difficult decisions for individual Members of this House. The choices before Members of this House are not easy, and I absolutely recognise that. As I said, when the final deal is brought to the House, individual Members will want to look at the details, with the interests of their constituents and of this country as a whole at the forefront of their consideration. As I say, I recognise that this is not an easy decision for people to take. I believe that what we have negotiated is in the best interests of our country overall. We will fill in more detail before the matter comes before the House, and I hope hon. Members will look at the fuller detail and consider the various issues, but that is in no way to say that the choice will be an easy one, and I fully recognise that.

Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab): I voted remain, but I represent a leave constituency. I try really hard to represent everybody in Lincoln, not just the people who shout the loudest, and I genuinely get an evenly split mailbox on this issue. I feel that this deal does not meet the aspirations and hopes of either side. It fails to protect jobs and the economy, and it creates a border down the Irish sea. If the Prime Minister will not listen to Labour Members, will she look at the faces of Members on her own side of the House, listen to their words and recognise that this is a really bad deal?

The Prime Minister: This deal does not create a border down the Irish sea. The outline political declaration on the future relationship takes the interests of people’s jobs into account by ensuring that we are negotiating a free trade area that will maintain a good trade relationship with the European Union that enables jobs to be not only maintained but created here in the UK.

Colin Clark (Gordon) (Con): Is the Prime Minister clear how committed her loyal Scottish Conservative colleagues are to fishing and the Union?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I am very clear about that. Indeed, I think that my hon. Friend and our Scottish Conservative colleagues are an admirable contrast to SNP Members, who are committed to neither fishing nor the Union.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): In the last few months, the Prime Minister has lost about a quarter of her Cabinet, with more resignations to follow. We have seen a dead-on-arrival deal trashed by large sections of her Back Benchers, and apparently letters are winging their way to the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Sir Graham Brady). How many more indignities does the Prime Minister have to endure before she considers her position?

The Prime Minister: My position is that I have only one duty: to deliver for the British people in the national interest.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): The Prime Minister will be aware that Hertfordshire is fortunate enough to have major businesses in the pharma, aerospace and motor industries. Those businesses rely on just-in-time arrangements for the delivery of parts and have integrated manufacturing across Europe. Does she feel that the agreement she has put before us will be in the best interests of such businesses and all the jobs in Hertfordshire that rely on them?

The Prime Minister: I do believe that that is the case. In developing this future relationship with the European Union, one of the key issues we have been considering is the need to ensure that trade across borders and those just-in-time supply chains can continue, because many jobs in constituencies around the country depend on that. I can give my right hon. and learned Friend that assurance.

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): I recently visited a business in Croydon that is looking at moving to warehouses just outside Amsterdam because it thinks that this Government’s direction of travel on Brexit will not work for it. It is clear that the Prime Minister will not get a vote for this deal through the House. She has ruled out extending article 50, she has ruled out a general election, she has ruled out a people’s vote and she has ruled out no deal as well. For the sake of businesses in Croydon that are waiting right now to know what will happen, can she categorically state what she will do if she loses the vote in Parliament?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Lady is concerned about businesses in Croydon, she should look carefully at the future relationship that we are developing with the European Union. We will fill out further details in relation to it, but that future relationship will deliver for businesses in Croydon, will deliver on the issues that they have expressed concerns about and will deliver in a way that ensures jobs can be kept in her constituency.

David Tredinnick (Bosworth) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on securing this deal. There is much in it that will please my constituents, who voted strongly to come out of the EU, for reasons including taking control of our borders and ending the free movement of labour. Her task of bringing the deal to the House for a meaningful vote will be much helped if she can flesh out the future relationship—that is critical. If her friends in Europe came to her aid and made it clear that they really do want a future relationship to be secured before the backstop comes into place, she would have a real chance of carrying the House.

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. I can reassure him that we will be filling out the detail of the future framework in negotiations in the coming days, so that when the House comes to take the meaningful vote, it will have a better understanding of the nature of the future relationship. As I say, I believe that the future relationship will deliver for industry across the country, for agriculture, for fishing and for our security.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): Does the Prime Minister accept that the fracturing of her party demonstrates that the 17.5 million people who voted leave in 2016 were not united in what Brexit means for them, and that therefore her claim of delivering on the majority vote of the British people is incorrect?

The Prime Minister: No. The majority vote of the British people was to leave the European Union, and that is what we will deliver.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I believe that those in Torbay who voted leave did so because they wanted to see a global trading Britain. That will be epitomised by us joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, which has been signed by some of our oldest allies, including the one that gifted the very Dispatch Box at which my right hon. Friend stands. Can she reassure me that the deal she is proposing will facilitate British membership of that agreement?

The Prime Minister: I can give my hon. Friend that reassurance. When we were looking at this proposal, we specifically looked at whether it would be possible to join the CPTPP. I can assure him not only that it would be possible for us to join it, but that members of the CPTPP such as Japan and Australia are keen for us to do so.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): Given that it is clear from the questions to the Prime Minister today that there is not a parliamentary majority for this deal, what is her plan? Is it just to wait for the vote to be lost and then panic? The British people deserve better than that. The Prime Minister has integrity, but she does not have the confidence of the House to get this deal through, and alternatives need to be brought before us and the British people.

The Prime Minister: We will negotiate the remaining details of this deal. There will be the EU Council on 25 November, and the deal will then be brought back to the House. Information will be made available to Members. It is at that point that Members of this House will determine whether they wish to support the deal.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): Which part of the financial settlement under the proposed withdrawal agreement would be payable during the implementation period and during any backstop?

The Prime Minister: The financial settlement has a trajectory in terms of payment, some of which would be beyond the periods to which my hon. Friend refers. There is no specific financial obligation in relation to the backstop, should that backstop come into play.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): If the Prime Minister is so confident of the merits of this deal, is she not slightly concerned that when she goes to Europe, other member states will look at it enviously and want to leave the European Union on similar terms? Is not the truth that the best possible relationship with the European Union, by definition, is the one that my constituents and people across Scotland voted for—to remain in the European Union?

The Prime Minister: I am tempted to refer the hon. Gentleman to answers I gave earlier to that question. We had a vote. The overall vote was that we should leave the European Union, and that is what we will deliver.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): On all important political decisions, I not only listen to my constituents and the businesses that employ my constituents, but ask myself, “Is this in the long-term interests of my children?” I have a great deal of respect for the Prime Minister, who is a dedicated public servant, so I ask her with all sincerity, given all the viable options available: is this deal in the best interests of my children?

The Prime Minister: I say to my hon. Friend that I genuinely believe that this deal is in the national interest, and that means it is in the best interests of people up and down the United Kingdom whatever age they are, including those who are children today. What I want to do is to ensure that, as we leave the European Union, we are able to build that brighter future with a good trade relationship with the EU—our nearest neighbours—and also to develop those trade relationships around the rest of the world. That has been at the forefront of our thinking, and I believe that is in the interest of his children and others’ for their future.

Thangam Debonnaire (Bristol West) (Lab): This is a very divided country, and with the rise of the far right, we should be reaching out across differences, not narrowing down and looking only at our own sides. I have sought out and listened to people who voted leave, despite the fact that I represent a very remain constituency, but the Prime Minister has not extended the same courtesy to my constituents and the rest of the 48%. I have to ask the Prime Minister: what has she got against listening to people who voted remain?

The Prime Minister: My own constituency voted remain, as it happens, and we have been listening to people across the country. We have been listening to businesses; we have been listening to individuals. I believe that the deal that we have negotiated with the European Union, with the final details yet to be completed, is one that does deliver. Actually, I think that most people in this country today want the Government to deliver Brexit, to get on with it and to ensure that we do so in a way that protects jobs and livelihoods across our country.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): Both the Scottish Secretary and Ruth Davidson have said that they could not possibly support, and indeed could resign over, any deal that put the integrity of the UK at risk—a reason now being cited in various ministerial resignations. I, of course, have every confidence in their personal integrity and take them at their word. Can the Prime Minister confirm whether she has received any correspondence informing her of resignations or intentions to do so? [*Interruption.*]

The Prime Minister: I am sorry; I thought the hon. Gentleman was asking me, effectively, whether any members of the Cabinet or Ministers had resigned. I think he will see from public information that there have been some.

Faisal Rashid (Warrington South) (Lab): After two years of insecurity and uncertainty, the Prime Minister is proposing an outline deal that is a real backward step

[Faisal Rashid]

from the position the UK is in now. Councils up and down the country, such as mine in Warrington, are urging MPs to ask for a people's vote so they can have a say on whether to be worse off. Does the Prime Minister agree that it is in the national interest now to go back to the people of this country? If Parliament votes down this deal, will she give the British people a voice?

The Prime Minister: We gave the British people a voice—we gave them the opportunity to choose between leaving and remaining in the European Union. They chose to leave, and that is what we will deliver.

Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con): When we become an independent coastal state again, which I very much look forward to, our fishing waters will of course need protecting. Will the Prime Minister consider commissioning a new fleet of very fast naval vessels to chase down and capture any vessels that come into our waters to fish uninvited, thus protecting fishing and our rights to fishing in Scotland and right down the east coast to East Anglia, including in the constituency of my neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous)?

The Prime Minister: I am not sure whether my hon. Friend's question was intended more to be support for the fishing industry or a bid for the Ministry of Defence—[*Interruption*—for the comprehensive spending review. We will be ensuring that we can operate as an independent coastal state and protect the interests of our fishing industry.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): Many people think that this is a bad deal that has little support in the House and very little chance of passing. May I ask the Prime Minister to tell me what safeguards there are for UK and EU citizens in the event of a no-deal Brexit?

The Prime Minister: We have been very clear that in the event of a no-deal Brexit, European Union citizens who are living here in the United Kingdom will have their rights protected.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): When is the next general election?

The Prime Minister: In 2022.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): This Government's fudged, botched Brexit deal is the worst of both worlds for both leave and remain. Does the Prime Minister not agree that as we have given the Government two years to make a complete dog's breakfast of Brexit negotiations yet still not to be in a position to command a majority in this House, it is now high time to end this charade, to waste no further time, to have a meaningful vote, and for us to take back control in this House?

The Prime Minister: There will be a meaningful vote. There will be a meaningful vote on the final deal, as it is agreed with the European Union.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I stand here with a heavy heart and great sadness. Does the Prime Minister recollect the biblical story of Jacob and Esau, in which Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of pottage? Does the Prime Minister see the similarity in that she is attempting to sell my children's and grandchildren's birthright and my constituents' rights to be British for a despicable and shoddy deal? As Rudyard Kipling said:

“Before an Empire's eyes
The traitor claims his price.
What need of further lies?
We are the sacrifice.”

Prime Minister, we will not be your sacrifice. We will not agree to give backstop control to the EU or to the Republic of Ireland over Northern Ireland—never.

The Prime Minister: I very much respect the hon. Gentleman, and I respect the concerns he has shown in relation to the issue of the backstop. While respecting him, I do reject the description that he has given of what is being done in relation to this deal. As I said earlier, it is clear that it is necessary to have a withdrawal agreement and, in that withdrawal agreement, to have this insurance policy. There are various ways in which that insurance policy can be exercised, and it is certainly my firm hope and my intent in everything that we work on and do to ensure that the backstop does not need to be put into practice.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): The Prime Minister will be aware that 27 million UK citizens hold a European health insurance card. May I ask her what, after December 2020, will be the status of the European health insurance card as it applies to UK citizens, or will it be redundant from January 2021?

The Prime Minister: Perhaps I will write to the hon. Gentleman with specifics on the health card, because that issue that has been negotiated in relation to the period to December 2020. The question of any reciprocal rights in relation to healthcare is a matter that is still to be negotiated for the future relationship, but I will write to him with more detail.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): The Prime Minister has been asked this question time and again, but I will try again. She has heard across the House that there is no support for her deal. She will not call a general election, she will not support a people's vote, she will not extend article 50, and her threat is her deal or no deal. Will she confirm that if the House does not support her deal, she will push us off the no-deal cliff edge?

The Prime Minister: As I have said in response to others, when the House comes to look at this deal, it will be for every Member to consider not only the duty to ensure that we deliver on the vote of the British people, but the long-term interests of their constituents.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): The Prime Minister has not explained what “in the national interest” actually means, so will she tell us, compared with remaining in the EU, how many extra jobs she believes will be created, how much faster our GDP will grow and how much better off each family will be?

The Prime Minister: Just to give the hon. Lady an example of one of the issues that she raises, if she looks at the report that the Office for Budget Responsibility produced at the time of the Budget, she will see that it said, well understanding that we were leaving the European Union, that over the next few years 800,000 more jobs would be created.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): On the protocol on Northern Ireland, paragraph 4 of a note about the agreement contains the extraordinary statement that “the parties should use their best endeavours to seek to facilitate trade between Great Britain and Northern Ireland.”

What assurance does that give this House about the integrity of the United Kingdom?

The Prime Minister: We have been working and are very clear, on the issues we have developed, that there will continue to be that trade between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. I responded a little earlier to another hon. Member in relation to the impact of any regulatory requirements that there are as a result of the UK-EU-wide customs territory. I was also clear about the changes that we have brought about—on approvals, for example, for companies to be able to sell and have business between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It was one of the commitments we gave in December, and it is a commitment that continues.

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): I am sure the irony has not been lost on the Prime Minister that exactly 80 years ago another Conservative Prime Minister came back from Europe waving a piece of paper and claiming success—I believe the exact words were “peace for our time”, and it was Neville Chamberlain. Given that there is no peace on the Conservative Benches and that the Prime Minister does not command the support of the House, will she tell us what the options are—a general election, a people’s vote, or a hard Brexit cliff edge?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman will have heard the answer that I have given to other Members of the House. When the deal is brought back from the European Council to this House, it will be up to individual Members of the House to determine whether or not they believe it is a deal that they can support in the interests of their constituents and in the national interest.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): Following this debate, the odds are that the Government will be forced into a U-turn on this other FOBT—namely the fudge over Brexit terms. Given that the meaningful vote is likely to fail, would it be prudent for the Prime Minister to ask the EU for an extension to article 50, and offer the public a second vote?

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to answers I gave earlier to both those questions.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): Prime Minister, we all understand the importance of the Belfast agreement, but these special arrangements for one part of the United Kingdom—Northern Ireland—will have an impact on the rest of the United Kingdom, including sea ports on the western seaboard, as they will create a de facto line across the Irish sea. The Prime Minister has managed

one thing today, which is to unite the DUP, my party and sections of her own party on this issue, so will she go back to Brussels—this is not a final agreement—and look at it again? Let us have fairness and unity in the United Kingdom.

The Prime Minister: I think the hon. Gentleman is referring to circumstances in which if the backstop were to be operated, of course the way that the border between Northern Ireland and Ireland would operate would be different from the way the border between Great Britain and the rest of the European Union would operate. That is exactly one of the issues that will be considered should we get to the point of having to determine whether the best option was the backstop or the implementation period. If it was an extension of the implementation period, the frictionless border with the rest of the EU would continue as it does today.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): The Prime Minister says that this is a choice between her botched option or no deal, but it is crystal clear to everyone that there is no majority support in the House for either of those options. It is also clear that the half-hearted preparation for no deal means she knows that it is not a realistic choice. When is she going to admit that she needs to allow Parliament to come up with alternatives, and that she had better do that sooner rather than later?

The Prime Minister: We are making clear preparations for no deal. We have continued to make those preparations and we stepped them up this summer. Parliament will have an opportunity to vote on the deal in a meaningful vote.

Paul Farrelly (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): At the outset of this statement, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) quite rightly stressed the importance of the free movement of goods. Services are also a vital part of our economy, and something at which we are very good. Will the Prime Minister explain what benefits her approach gives to the services sector that it does not already enjoy? Importantly, what influence will it have after transition on the future development of the single market, including the digital single market?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman will know, once we leave the European Union we will not participate in decisions that it takes in relation to its market. Services are so important to the UK economy that it is important that the flexibility set out in the outline political declaration is available to financial services and others. This is a key area for the United Kingdom, and I expect we will be able to develop good partnerships and relationships not just with the European Union, but with other parts of the world as well, in the interests of the hon. Gentleman’s constituents and others across the country.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): The Prime Minister finally admitted last night that there are not two but three possible outcomes given where we currently stand, yet she insists that Parliament will be allowed only a binary choice between two of them, and will be denied the right to vote on the only one of those options that has any chance of commanding majority support. We will be denied the right to vote on the option that the

[Peter Grant]

majority of MPs now believe to be in the best interests of their constituents. By what stretch of the imagination does that constitute a meaningful vote, and in what parallel universe can it be described as returning control to Parliament?

The Prime Minister: The meaningful vote will be an amendable motion, but as I have said, if we asked most members of the public, “If the Government bring a deal back from Brussels, what do you expect Parliament to vote on?”, I think they would expect Parliament to vote on that deal.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): The Prime Minister has to accept responsibility for the position she has put herself in. She thought it was a good idea to make the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) her Foreign Secretary, and she appointed two arch-Brexiteers as Brexit Secretary. Those people were always going to lay her low and desert her, and she is now left with no majority for her position in the House. Surely she has to hold a vote in this House to give an indicative position of the House of Commons on this deal before she goes to a summit at the end of this month, so that she can honestly represent the views of the House on the deal she has negotiated.

The Prime Minister: The House will be able to vote on the final deal that is negotiated with the European Council. That is the commitment we have made to the House, and that is what will happen.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): The people of Scotland voted by a wide margin to remain in the EU, and ever since that point their democratic wishes have been disrespected, as have those of the democratically elected Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government, who put forward compromise positions on Brexit to the UK Government. Will the Prime Minister confirm that yesterday the disrespect to the people of Scotland was extended threefold, first by providing a differential deal to Northern Ireland; secondly by providing briefings to the Government of Gibraltar before the Scottish Government; and thirdly—as was pointed out on Radio Scotland this morning by the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie)—because Conservative Members from Scotland were briefed on the text of the withdrawal agreement before the Scottish Government? Is that the case?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman talks about respecting the position that has been taken. Throughout this process we have respected the fact that we are negotiating on behalf of, and in the interests of, the whole United Kingdom. We have continued to do that, and we will continue to do that, and Scotland of course is part of the United Kingdom.

Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab): I grateful to you, Mr Speaker, for your indulgence earlier today. I wish to ask the Prime Minister, why is no Brexit a “risk” to the United Kingdom and my constituency?

The Prime Minister: The people of this country voted to leave the European Union, and I believe that it is in their interests, and the duty of this Parliament, to deliver that. I said that there was a risk of no Brexit at

all, and a number of Opposition Members have said that they would prefer to keep us in the European Union. I disagree—the British people voted to leave, and we will leave.

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): My primary concern throughout this process has been jobs in my community, and nobody knows more about negotiating for jobs than our nation’s trade unions that represent millions of working people. Since this deal has been struck, has the Prime Minister spoken to our unions or their representatives, and if not, what day will she do so?

The Prime Minister: I assure the hon. Gentleman that the interests of trade unions and businesses have been taken into account in the work that has been done, and there has been interaction between trade unions and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): I have a very specific question and I would like a specific answer. The statement of intent for the EU settlement scheme said that those applying will not be required to show that they meet all the requirements of current free movement rules, but that has been contradicted by the latest set of immigration regulations. From my reading, this agreement is ambiguous on that point. Will the Prime Minister indicate whether, as she promised, it will be possible for people to get settled status if they can prove they have been resident and pass a criminality check, but might not be able, through no fault of their own, to prove that they have been exercising their European economic area treaty rights?

The Prime Minister: I think I heard the hon. Lady say that the regulations were ambiguous, and claimed that that ambiguity necessarily contradicted what had been said previously. In the interests of making sure that she gets as accurate a reply as possible, I will write to her on this matter.

Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab): There are a number of simple truths among the political noise: first, Brexit is bad for Britain; secondly, the Prime Minister’s proposal has no majority in the House; and thirdly, on the future relationship, the thing that all my constituents wish to know about, regardless of their view on Brexit, is a seven-page wish list and nothing else. The Prime Minister said today that she will bring further details to the House, but can she confirm how long we will have, as a House, as Select Committees and as constituency MPs in conversation with our constituents, to fully understand the consequences of her future proposal between the UK and the EU?

The Prime Minister: We will ensure that Parliament, before it takes the meaningful vote, is able to see both the future framework as it is developed in greater detail than it is at the moment in the outline political declaration, together with, as I have indicated, the various forms of analysis that the Government have committed to.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): Given that the Prime Minister’s own Scottish Tory MPs no longer have confidence in her Secretary of State for

Scotland, who has been trampled over on fisheries and the Irish backstop, and who could not even turn up today, how can she seriously suggest that this deal offers anything other than an undermining of the integrity of the United Kingdom?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman's portrayal of the position of the Secretary of State for Scotland is completely wrong. The Secretary of State for Scotland is doing an excellent job, together with my Scottish Conservative colleagues on the Government Benches, in defending the interests of Scotland, and is doing so in a rather better way than the SNP.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): Just to come back on the comment by the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney), to be very clear the Secretary of State for Scotland has not had a red line crossed. I hope my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will affirm again that we will negotiate fishing as an independent coastal state in 2020. Furthermore, Scotland has been respected and is being respected by consulting Scottish MPs in this House, as is appropriate.

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for pointing that out. I confirm the commitments I gave earlier about the position of the United Kingdom as an independent coastal state.

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): Given the absence of the lesser-spotted Secretary of State for Scotland in the past 48 hours, will the Prime Minister take this opportunity to explain to those living in my already economically fragile constituency exactly why her deal puts them at a competitive disadvantage to their very close neighbours in Northern Ireland?

The Prime Minister: Scottish National party Members have on a number of occasions referred to the issue of Northern Ireland in relation to Scotland in this deal. Northern Ireland has a particular set of circumstances that do not—[*Interruption.*] The hon. Gentleman says, “Oh, and we do not?” No, you do not—

Mr Speaker: Order. This is really the height of discourtesy. The Prime Minister is answering the question and she must be heard. The question has been asked, the Prime Minister is answering it and the hon. Gentleman is jabbering away from a sedentary position to no obvious benefit or purpose.

The Prime Minister: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The hon. Gentleman was suggesting that Scotland was in the same position as Northern Ireland. Of course it is not; it does not have a land border with a country that is going to be within the European Union.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): This deal is far worse for our young people than the deal they currently have with our membership of the EU. This deal has no guarantees on Erasmus, funding for EU students, their travel and work rights in Europe and EU research funding worth €100 billion. When the future of millions of young people is at stake, does the Prime Minister not agree that it is time to let them vote for

their future with a people's vote, particularly for those young people who did not get a vote last time because they were not old enough?

The Prime Minister: There are references in what we have agreed in relation to some of the matters the hon. Lady raises, but the deal is about the future of this country. [*Interruption.*] She is holding up the withdrawal agreement. The withdrawal agreement is about our withdrawal from the European Union. It is not about our future relationship. The matters she referred to are about our future relationship.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): Can the Prime Minister look my constituents in the eye and guarantee that this withdrawal agreement will put them in a better position than the one they currently enjoy as a member of the European Union, and promise them that not one will be a penny worse off as a result of the agreement?

The Prime Minister: What is going to ensure the future of the hon. Gentleman's constituents and those of Members across the House is not the withdrawal agreement but the future relationship we deliver with the European Union. That is precisely why we have made the element of the economic partnership as such an important part of that future relationship.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): The Prime Minister has yet to answer a simple but very important question: if her deal is rejected, what will her Government do next?

The Prime Minister: As I said quite a lot earlier in answer to a question, the process were that to happen is set out quite clearly for this House. The question is: how will individual Members of this House approach this decision when they come to make it in the interests of the country and in the interests of their constituents? They will need to have at the forefront of their minds the duty to deliver on the vote of the British people to leave the European Union, and the overall national interest of our country and the interests of their constituents.

Anna McMorrin (Cardiff North) (Lab): The world is looking on with horror and sympathy. My constituents, people up and down Wales and across the UK worry about how to make ends meet. They know now that Brexit is bad for Britain. Can the Prime Minister tell my constituents exactly how this deal will make them better off than they are now?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady says she is concerned. I have set out before why I think this deal, the future partnership we can have with the European Union and trade deals around the rest of the world can benefit our economy, benefit jobs and benefit the hon. Lady's constituents. She says her constituents worry about how to make ends meet. That is precisely why this Government continue to increase the national living wage and put through tax cuts for millions of people.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Could the Prime Minister enlighten the House as to why the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Sir Graham Brady) may be meeting the Government Chief Whip at this moment?

Mr Speaker: Order. That is nothing to do with the statement.

Dr Paul Williams (Stockton South) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker, and thank you to the Prime Minister for staying to answer everyone's questions. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

The Prime Minister says we risk no Brexit at all. Our NHS relies on EU workers and depends on EU research and medicines collaboration. How is this deal better for the NHS than no Brexit?

The Prime Minister: First of all, the British people voted to leave the European Union and we have a duty to deliver on that. If the hon. Gentleman is concerned about the future of the NHS, then I hope he supports the significant decision this Government have taken to make the biggest injection of funding into our NHS in its history with our multi-year funding programme, over £80 billion more going into the NHS and the 10-year plan that ensures the sustainability of our NHS into the future.

Mr Speaker: Prime Minister, thank you. Colleagues, thank you.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I will take the hon. Gentleman's point of order if it is material to what we have been discussing, but I do then wish to proceed to the business statement.

Neil Gray: I thank you for your flexibility, Mr Speaker.

It was suggested this morning on Radio Scotland by the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie), and later apparently confirmed by the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham), that the Conservative Members of this House from Scotland were given advance sight of the withdrawal agreement before other party leaders in this House and before the democratically elected devolved Administrations. I know my constituents would see that as disorderly and disrespectful, but I wonder, Mr Speaker, whether you could confirm, in terms of the rules of this House, whether that was disorderly and disrespectful?

Mr Speaker: That is certainly nothing to do with the rules of the House. I am sorry to disappoint the hon. Gentleman if he thinks it is, but it is not. There are judgments to be made in this matter and opinions will differ as to the wisdom of particular courses of action, but there has been no breach of order. I absolutely recognise his irritation or dissatisfaction, but that is distinct from any question of procedural impropriety.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. In response to the point of order that was just made—

Mr Speaker: Order. This is not a debate. If the hon. Gentleman is seeking a ruling from the Chair, he can raise a point of order. If he just wants to have a tit for tat with another hon. Member, it is not the proper use of a point of order—[*Interruption.*] He wanted a tit for tat—[*Interruption.*] No, he wants a ruling. Very good.

Luke Graham: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I am looking for your ruling, advice and clarification on how to make sure that the record is read correctly in relation to a point that was made in the House earlier today regarding what Scottish Conservatives said about looking at Government texts before they had been released to other MPs. During the previous statement, I mentioned my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister engaging with Scottish MPs, but as I am sure *Hansard* will reflect, it was in relation to the statement this morning and not a preview of any other text. How can I clarify this, Mr Speaker?

Mr Speaker: Clarification—I advise the hon. Gentleman in terms that brook no contradiction or misunderstanding—is contained within the terms of his own inquiry. As he just emphasised, statements were made earlier during the course of exchanges. Because those statements were made, they will be recorded in the *Official Report*. Therefore, all people need to do is study the *Official Report*, including to establish what was and what was not said by the hon. Gentleman. I hope that that is helpful to him and that he will now go about his business with an additional glint in his eye and a spring in his step for the rest of the day. Very good.

Business of the House

1.32 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom): I would like to announce that the business for next week will be:

MONDAY 19 NOVEMBER—Consideration in Committee of the Finance (No. 3) Bill (day 1).

TUESDAY 20 NOVEMBER—Continuation of consideration in Committee of the Finance (No. 3) Bill (day 2).

WEDNESDAY 21 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Fisheries Bill.

THURSDAY 22 NOVEMBER—General debate on the armed forces covenant.

FRIDAY 23 NOVEMBER—Private Members' Bills.

The provisional business for the week commencing 26 November will include:

MONDAY 26 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Courts and Tribunals (Judiciary and Functions of Staff) Bill [*Lords*].

The House is rightly focused on the important decisions that lie ahead of us with regard to leaving the EU, but we also continue to fulfil the many other vital aspects of our parliamentary roles, so I was delighted, along with you, Mr Speaker, to welcome the Youth Parliament to the Chamber last week and to hear of the significant issues that its members wanted to debate, such as mental health and serious violence.

Also last week, we had the first ever Women MPs of the World Conference in this Chamber, demonstrating our commitment to global outreach and promoting our democratic values. This week is Parliament Week—a chance for hundreds of schools and civic organisations to take part in and promote democratic engagement.

Finally, along with the Prime Minister, you, Mr Speaker, and others, the Leader of the Lords and I look forward to presenting a Humble Address to His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales later today on the event of his 70th birthday.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for the statement. I, too, congratulate the Youth Parliament; it was absolutely wonderful to hear its members debate the issues rather than people.

I thank the Leader of the House for the forthcoming business—again, it is a week and a day, and we do not seem to be any nearer getting the dates for Easter recess. The staff of the House need to make plans. I know that there have been many more things to discuss and that it has been difficult to get those dates, but could she possibly look at doing so for next week?

I ask the Leader of the House to remind her colleagues about the ministerial code. The Government have again breached paragraph 9.1:

“When Parliament is in session, the most important announcements of Government policy should be made in the first instance, in Parliament.”

It took numerous points of order and a letter from the leaders of all the Opposition parties for the Government to finally realise that they had to abide by the code and make a statement to Parliament—we are very grateful that that was done today and to the Prime Minister for staying and taking all the questions. I hope that the Leader of the House will continue to remind the Government of their duties.

It was a marathon session of the Cabinet yesterday. I wonder whether they all started with, “I hadn’t quite understood the importance of” the Dover-Calais border/the economy/jobs/security/the effect on science—delete where applicable for each of the Secretaries of State when they read the draft agreement. We have had the statement, but could the Leader of the House outline the timetable for the next stage? The Prime Minister alluded to the fact that the House will get a debate; will it be before or after Christmas? When are we likely to be able to scrutinise this very important agreement, given that the EU will be meeting on 25 November?

On Tuesday, the House resolved that the legal advice from the Law Officers would be made available. Will the Leader of the House say when it will be published? Why did it take the Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh), to publish a letter from the Environment Secretary saying that he was raiding 400 staff from other agencies to work on Brexit? When will we get a statement and the impact assessment on the effect of enforcing the regulations that deal with recycling, air pollution and flooding?

Turning to more contempt of Parliament and the vulnerable, private companies are making large sums of money by locking up our young. There are 2,375 people with autism and learning disabilities held in assessment and treatment units. Seven providers are charging taxpayers up to £730,000 a year for each patient. The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care announced that he has “instigated a Care Quality Commission review into the inappropriate use of prolonged seclusion and segregation.”—[*Official Report*, 5 November 2018; Vol. 648, c. 1264.]

However, that was in a wider statement on prevention of ill health, and no notice was given to the Opposition. My hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) made a point of order to ask the Secretary of State to come to the House to make a statement on that review. As she said, this is scandalous. Could we have a statement on this important review, including the timeframe for reporting back? No child should be deprived of their liberty in this way. They need support, not imprisonment.

More disarray: I was going to say that the Government have lost one Minister—the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch)—but actually it is half the Cabinet. A week later, the Government have done what she asked; a written statement was slipped out yesterday. My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) and others have campaigned for this change, and the Minister will have had to give weight to relevant or irrelevant considerations, so this is not about losing money to the Exchequer, but about saving lives.

Yet another fall-out from the referendum is the number of statutory instruments—800 to 1,000. I am pleased to say that Parliament staff have worked on an SI tracker, which is now available, so I thank them for doing that. We can filter it by European Union SIs, but not by when they are going to be laid, so we have absolutely no idea of when the SIs will come to be scrutinised. We need to know that to give them effective scrutiny. Perhaps some sort of category such as “SIs on hold” or “Waiting to be laid” might be quite useful for Members.

It has been announced that a memorial to PC Keith Palmer near Carriage Gates has been agreed with his family. The Police Memorial Trust said that the memorial

[Valerie Vaz]

would be a reminder of PC Palmer's sacrifice and heroism. We need our police officers in the House; they provide valuable back-up to other House staff, such as the Doorkeepers and those around the Estate. We need them, and we thank them for their work.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) had a debate yesterday on police pensions. In the west midlands, the changes will cost about £22 million—that is what the west midlands force will have to deal with. That is putting a huge amount of pressure on police forces. The Home Secretary and the Chancellor should come up with a solution now, as the Minister for Policing and the Fire Service alluded to yesterday. Could we have statement to the House on that? It would be a fitting recognition of our police service.

Mr Speaker, yesterday you read out a great letter from our Clerk. I know that there is time until his retirement for tributes to him, but we appreciate the sentiments that he expressed in his resignation letter and thank him for his guidance and expertise in his 43 years of service. He will be missed.

Finally, I want to add my own good wishes to His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales on his 70th birthday, as I did not have a chance to do so yesterday. I do not know whether Members are aware of one of the facts about him, which is that every time he plants a tree, he gives it a little shake for good luck. I wonder whether the Prime Minister did the same to her Cabinet yesterday. I shall certainly remember to do it when planting trees for the Queen's Commonwealth canopy.

His Royal Highness is a great innovator. He highlighted organic farming many years ago, before it was fashionable, and as his mum—our Gracious Sovereign—said, he is a true Duchy Original. I wish him a belated penblwydd hapus.

Andrea Leadsom: Let me first join the hon. Lady in paying tribute to the Clerk of the House. I have already made my views clear—he has done a great service to the House, and we wish him a long and happy retirement. I also pay tribute to PC Keith Palmer, who sacrificed his own life for us in this place. It is very fitting that there will be a memorial to him here.

As for the hon. Lady's other requests, as ever, there were many. I am not quite sure that I can offer a statement on how to shake Cabinet members into submission, but it is an interesting suggestion.

The hon. Lady asked about the Easter recess dates. I can only say again that we have announced the Christmas and February recesses, and we will announce the Easter recess in due course. I remind the hon. Lady that in 2010 the Easter recess was announced on 18 March, about 12 days before it started. I think we have a way to go before we can match the appalling—[*Interruption.*] Yes, we can do better. I totally agree. I fully intend to do better than that.

The hon. Lady said that we had breached the ministerial code. I entirely rebut that, and it is quite outrageous that she should suggest such a thing. The Prime Minister made herself available to the House at the first opportunity to make a statement, and she answered questions for three hours, many of them totally repetitive. The House

gives her absolutely no quarter, but it does owe her some respect for that marathon statement, and it does not owe her the discourtesy of suggesting that it broke the ministerial code. I should like to see some evidence of that if the hon. Lady wants to press the point, because she is entirely wrong.

The hon. Lady asked about the timetable for the next stage of the process. As the Prime Minister said, the European Council meeting will be on 25 November. After that point the deal will be finalised, and it will then be brought back to the House for a lengthy review, for discussion, for debate, and for a meaningful vote.

The hon. Lady referred to what she said was another aspect of contempt of Parliament, but did not quite explain what she meant by that. As far as I am aware, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has made absolutely clear his concern about young people being locked up owing to mental health problems. As the hon. Lady said, he did discuss the issue in his statement on prevention, but if she wants to raise it with him again, I suggest that she table a parliamentary question or raise it during Health and Social Care questions on 4 December.

I am not entirely sure what to make of the hon. Lady's point about Cabinet losses; I think that she, and indeed all Members, should celebrate the fact that the Government are addressing the scourge of gambling addiction, rather than trying to score political points.

The hon. Lady asked about statutory instruments. She will know that the Government have really sought to get a handle on SIs to ensure that the flow is even and the House has time to consider them properly. I have already made it clear—but she may wish to consult the House of Lords Select Committee that is looking into the matter—that the number of SIs will be at the lower end of 800 to 1,000, possibly even lower than that, but we are bringing them forward at a good rate. We are providing further information on the bandings and the likely range of numbers of SIs each month, to be helpful to the sifting Committees in both Houses, and we will continue to co-operate as much as we can to ensure that we get a good Brexit.

Mr John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): Yesterday in this place we congratulated His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales on his birthday—the greatest living Briton, Mr Speaker; you and I are on the list, but not at the apex.

One of the prince's many achievements is to be patron of the Heritage Crafts Association. That association covers everyone and everything from wheelwrights to woodturners, from lorinery to lamp making, from passementery to targetting. A study that I initiated as a Minister in 2012 revealed that it is, collectively, worth £4.4 billion to our economy, employing 200,000 people. Should we not have a debate in the House on those heritage crafts? They, in the union of beauty and utility, add lustre to lives and wealth to our nation.

Andrea Leadsom: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for raising a lovely subject. I am not quite sure what my response should be, except to say that I should certainly welcome such a debate, and also to pay tribute to the wonderful contribution that heritage craftspeople make to the beauty of our environment.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the—still in place—Leader of the House for announcing the business for next week. She has only gone and upset my Brexit resignation bingo coupon, Mr Speaker. I had her down as a definite resigner today. However, I know that there will be further opportunities later in the day. She will probably have something to say about her place in all this. Once she has recovered from the hangover from all the unchilled Chardonnay that was consumed last night, we may get a sense of what actually happened at that Cabinet meeting.

What we want to hear from the Leader of the House now, however, is what is going to happen next. We need to be reassured that this nonsensical binary choice between a bad deal and no deal is taken right off the table. We have just listened to the Prime Minister's statement. More than half the Tory Back Benchers were trashing and traducing her deal. It will not get through the House. We are facing the option of a no-deal Brexit. We need to design a process whereby the House could consider a proper response, with all the options properly presented, so that we could make an informed choice. The Leader of the House must say today that it is not about a bad deal or no deal, the devil or the deep blue sea.

May we have a debate about huffing and puffing? The Scottish people are looking at my Scottish Conservative colleagues with a mixture of bemusement and bewilderment. First, they threaten to resign, then they do not resign, then they write letters with red lines, then they do nothing, then they write more letters—only to be ignored, which then seems to satisfy them. They are about the most useless rebels in the history of parliamentary rebellions. Everyone in Scotland is watching the wonderful “Outlaw King” on Netflix, the story of the great king Robert the Bruce. We can only imagine what the Bruce would do if he had to rely on these “rebels”—they would still be sending letters to Edward I as the heavy horse came charging over their heads.

Lastly, given the scale of the resignations that we have seen today—I think that a quarter of the Cabinet have resigned in the past few months—perhaps the Leader of the House would consider providing a spot in the parliamentary weekly calendar that would allow “resignees”, if we can call them that, to come forward in the comfort of this place, rather than having to stand outside on that draughty green to give their views to the press. I think that that is worth considering.

Andrea Leadsom: I am normally happy to entertain the hon. Gentleman's banter, but all that he has done today is demonstrate that he is not very good at bingo. He is also not very good at disrespecting the Scottish Conservatives, who at least understand how to fulfil the will of the people.

The hon. Gentleman talked of my having to resign: he had me down as a “resignee”. What I can say to him is that I am staying in the Government because there is more work to be done to secure the Brexit that the Prime Minister wants to deliver to the people and I am determined to support her. The hon. Gentleman's bantering about that and mocking it is all very well, but he does not suggest anything else, and his party has form for ignoring the will of the people in Scotland, who voted in a referendum to stay in the United Kingdom. What are SNP Members doing sitting there? All they want to

do is break up the United Kingdom and, against the will of Scottish fishers, keep them in the common fisheries policy. How much sense does that make?

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): The Chairman of the Backbench Business Committee is away on other parliamentary business. He has asked me to plead with the Leader of the House to give us some time to allocate in the Chamber. There is a queue for debates, some of them time-sensitive, that would extend to the end of January if we were given every Thursday. So may I ask for some extra time?

This is my question. Last week, we celebrated the Hindu new year and for most of us it was a joyous occasion. The following day, very sadly, the Willesden temple was broken into and the idols, or statues, that all Hindus celebrate were stolen. Subsequently, earlier this week, the Kenton temple was also broken into and the same thing happened. May we have a statement from the Home Secretary on the subject, so that greater security could be provided for Hindu temples across the country to prevent this from happening anywhere else?

Andrea Leadsom: I am really sorry to hear about the break-ins at Willesden and Kenton temples. That is appalling. I encourage my hon. Friend to take the opportunity to speak to the Home Secretary about that himself. I am sure he will do that. I am very aware that we need to provide Back-Bench time. I am working on it and would be happy to meet him and the Chairman of the Backbench Business Committee to discuss their priorities.

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): Last Friday, we witnessed some of the best contributions I have ever heard in this Chamber. After a day of passionate speeches, the UK Youth Parliament chose knife crime as one of its two campaign priorities this year. Several MYPs called on the Government to treat knife crime as a public health crisis. I join their calls and ask, for the seventh time: when will the Government grant this House a debate on the public health approach?

Andrea Leadsom: As I said in my introductory remarks, I was also delighted to hear the extent of the impassioned debate in the Youth Parliament and MYPs are right to raise that very serious issue, as is the hon. Lady. I am aware that she raised it directly with Home Office Ministers earlier this week and I have written to them on her behalf. So she has very well raised this issue, as she should, and I hope to come back to her on it soon.

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on the use of meanwhile spaces? Under present arrangements, charity shops, artists and entrepreneurs often take these spaces for three months and then face the full business charge, which seems very unfair under the circumstances.

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend raises an important issue. He will be aware that the Government introduced a range of business rate reforms worth over £13 billion in England over the next five years, and that we want to encourage the use of empty town centre properties by some of those occupiers who can contribute to the vitality of town centres. We launched our “open doors” project this month, which matches community groups

[*Andrea Leadsom*]

looking for spaces with empty commercial properties and I encourage him to speak directly to Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government Ministers to see what more can be done to protect them from unnecessary costs.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): After two years, the Prime Minister has said the Government will act to stop rogue bosses swiping tips intended for staff. In answer to my written parliamentary question, the Government, however, have said that this requires primary legislation. When will the Leader of the House make time available for this important Bill?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady raises an important point. She is absolutely right; this does require primary legislation. We will be looking carefully at how we can bring that forward as soon as possible. In the meantime we have Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy questions on Tuesday 20 November and she might want to raise the issue there.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): I am glad my right hon. Friend told us about the women MPs of the world and the Youth Parliament, which has also been referred to. I was able to listen to a bit of the women MPs of the world debate and I was very pleased to see them contributing in this Chamber.

Early-day motion 1826 is on the Shaw report on deportation.

[*That this House joins the Home Secretary in endorsing the recommendations of the Shaw Report on possible deportations of foreign nationals, especially when they last lived in their family's country of residence when young.*]

It is associated with two previous EDMs, Nos. 1591 and 1630, about Kweku Adoboli, together with the written questions that were tabled yesterday— questions 157 to 162, on page 19. Is it possible to have a debate on the Shaw report? Can Ministers, instead of saying “We don’t discuss individual cases,” actually say why someone has been deported to a country he last lived in when he was four, and what risk assessment was made of his being allowed to stay here?

May I briefly also mention early-day motion 1440 on fixed odds betting terminals from the summer?

[*That this House welcomes the Government's decision to cut the stake on Fixed Odds Betting Terminals to £2; acknowledges that a £2 stake is now supported by parties across this House; notes that a reduced stake will greatly improve the lives of problem and at-risk gamblers, as well as their families and wider communities; further notes with concern that each day £5 million is lost on such machines; notes with equal concern that the stake is not due to be reduced until April 2020; and calls on the Government to implement this new reduced stake of £2 immediately, to prevent any further gambling related harm or possible loss of life.*]

It has been well met by responses in the Commons and by the Government, and I thank the Government for that. We look forward to seeing it in the Finance (No. 3) Bill and to seeing progress to reduce the appalling losses, particularly for people who cannot afford the money they are betting.

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend raises a number of important points. On deportations, I encourage him to seek an Adjournment debate so he can raise his EDM issues directly with Ministers. On FOBTs, he raises a very good point that many hon. and right hon. Members will have a lot of sympathy with.

Colleen Fletcher (Coventry North East) (Lab): In my constituency, tributes are gradually being withdrawn from the site where two young brothers were killed earlier this year by a speeding motorist who was high on drugs and received a paltry sentence for the crime. Last October, the Government announced they planned to increase the maximum penalty for death by dangerous driving. A year on, we are still waiting. May we therefore have a debate or statement on when the Government will introduce the Bill to increase the sentences given to those found guilty of causing death by dangerous driving?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady raises a very serious issue and it is completely horrendous when anyone is killed as a result of dangerous driving. She will be aware that we had a debate, as a result of many representations from hon. Members, just before recess. I hope that she was able to make her points there, but certainly Ministers are looking very carefully at what more can be done.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): The Procedure Committee, on which I sit, is going to report imminently on the meaningful vote. It would obviously be wrong for me to provide a trailer for that, but I can give my personal views, and I wonder what the Leader of the House thinks about this. If we are going to have a meaningful vote, should not we know what we are voting on? Is not it the right thing to do, in accordance with the normal procedure of the House, to have the amendments first? Some of us are Brexiteers and some are remainers, but we all believe in the supremacy and importance of Parliament. This motion is amendable and it makes no sense at all to vote on the main motion having no idea what subsequent amendments might be passed. So can the Leader of the House consider at least that as a representation—we should take the amendments first?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend will be aware that there will be, as the Prime Minister said earlier, plenty of time for discussion and consideration of exactly what the deal looks like and of the advice given around it, and indeed for consideration of amendments that hon. Members want to bring forward. Clearly, once the deal with the EU has been agreed, Parliament will have a vote on the withdrawal agreement and the terms of our future partnership. Parliament will have the choice to accept or reject the deal. Of course if Parliament accepts the deal, we will introduce the EU withdrawal agreement Bill, which will implement it in domestic legislation, and if Parliament chooses to reject the deal, the Government will be unable to ratify the agreement. But to be clear, of course the motion will be amendable.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): On Saturday, my daughter Jessica, will be two months old and Saturday is also World Prematurity Day. My daughter was born very premature. At the moment, under UK law, fathers have to take their paternity leave within 56 days, but that is very difficult to do when their child is in a

neonatal intensive care unit. Will the Leader of the House agree to a debate so we can look at this issue and change the law for good?

Andrea Leadsom: First, may I say that Jessica is gorgeous? We all saw the tweets that the hon. Gentleman put out and congratulate him again; we are so pleased she is making good progress—that is great to hear. He raises an important point and I encourage him to raise it directly with Health Ministers on 27 November. I am sure they will be keen to support him.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): May we have an urgent debate on the way in which private landlords treat some charities? Families United Network is the most amazing charity, serving a lot of my constituents, and it is facing having its rent doubled, which will probably put it out of its premises. This charity provides respite care that is desperately needed by families with disabled children. I visited the charity and it does amazing work. It concerns me that a company such as Petchey Holdings can just threaten to double the rent, effectively meaning the charity has to close down.

Andrea Leadsom: I am sorry to hear about that and hope that my hon. Friend raising it in the Chamber will cause the landlord to think again. He is right to raise the problem of landlords unreasonably raising rents and the Government are looking at what more can be done to prevent that from happening.

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): Last Friday, we marked the two-year anniversary of the worst rail disaster for decades: the Croydon tram crash, which took the lives of seven people and injured many more. The Rail Accident Investigation Branch report was published last year, and its first recommendation was to set up a UK tram safety board to ensure that nothing like this could happen again. The Government have withheld funding for the board, so it has not yet been set up, and that withholding of funds leaves all those across the country who travel on trams potentially less safe than they should be. Last year, when the investigation report was published, I asked for a debate and for a Minister to come to this place, but no Minister has been to the House to talk about this at all. May I ask that a Minister comes to this place to make a statement about the Croydon tram crash and how we can ensure that nothing like it happens again?

Andrea Leadsom: We all recall that appalling day and that terrible crash. It was horrendous, and the hon. Lady is absolutely right to raise the matter here. We will have Transport questions next Thursday 22 November, and I encourage her to ask her question then.

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): Yesterday it was announced that the House of Fraser store in the Metro Centre was to close, apparently following a breakdown in rental negotiations. Will the Leader of the House join me in offering the staff commiserations on the loss of their jobs? Will she also arrange a debate in Government time to discuss the retail sector and the impact that these rent discussions are having on shops?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady raises a really important point. We know that the retail sector is under great strain at the moment, not least because people are changing

the way in which they shop and doing much more shopping online. I certainly agree that we should all send our best wishes to those who are losing their jobs, and of course Jobcentre Plus will stand ready to support them in finding other work. The House has had a number of debates on what more can be done in the retail sector, and I encourage the hon. Lady to take part in next week's Finance Bill Committee debates so that she can raise this issue again.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): The Leader of the House will be aware that there are 115 pieces of proposed legislation to be debated on 23 November, including the beautifully written Workers (Definition and Rights) Bill—

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I wonder who that was written by.

Chris Stephens: Funnily enough, it was the Member for Glasgow South West. Can the Leader of the House indicate whether more time will be allocated for the House to debate private Members' Bills in the future?

Andrea Leadsom: I tabled a motion on Monday to provide the House with an additional three sitting Fridays, but unfortunately it was objected to. All hon. Members will know that the Government are keen to support some of the excellent private Members' Bills, and that is why that time has been provided. I will put forward the motion again shortly, as I am keen for the House to have those extra days.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): The only Crown post office in the centre of Cardiff, Wales's capital city, is to be franchised to WH Smith, a failing retailer, together with 73 other post offices across the country. May we please have a debate on stopping this unnecessary and damaging privatisation, which is going to affect the jobs of 800 people?

Andrea Leadsom: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for raising this point again—it has been raised a number of times at business questions. As I have explained to other hon. Members, the Post Office is moving some of its centres into WH Smith. That is designed not to reduce the services in any way, but to rationalise them. Indeed, in taking on banking and other services, the post office network around the country is often enabling people to get a better service than previously.

Chris Bryant: I am delighted that the Leader of the House is staying in her job because I will admit—as long as she does not tell anybody else—that I quite like her. *[Interruption.]* Blowing kisses is not going to get her anywhere, however.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): Well, we know that.

Chris Bryant: Easy!

As the Leader of the House will know, the House passed a Magnitsky-style measure in the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018. The Government have provided three excuses for not doing anything about this yet. One is that it cannot be done until the end of Brexit, and the Foreign Secretary says that that

[Chris Bryant]

means after the transition period is over. Another reason is that we would have to table statutory instruments and that there is no time for SIs. However, everyone in this House would love to get this done as quickly as possible. Other countries in Europe have already done it, so will she please stay in her job just to get this thing done?

Andrea Leadsom: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman; I also enjoy our little altercations across the Floor of the House on so many different subjects. I hear what he is saying, and I would be happy to raise this with Ministers directly on his behalf.

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): May we have a debate on who should be on the front of the new £50 note, and will the Leader of the House back the campaign supported by the Stoke-on-Trent *Sentinel* to have the brilliant engineer who designed the Spitfire, Reginald Mitchell, as the winner?

Andrea Leadsom: That is a very leading question from the hon. Lady. I absolutely applaud her for suggesting that we should have some sort of debate on this. I could probably come up with my own proposals as well. She makes a good suggestion, and I encourage her to seek a Westminster Hall debate so that all hon. Members can have their say.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Yesterday, I met a delegation from Burma consisting of Christians and Buddhists. In September 2018, a United Nations fact-finding mission published a report cataloguing the human rights violations committed by the Burmese military. The report accuses military generals of genocide against the Rohingya, and also outlines crimes such as murder and arbitrary imprisonment. In the past few months, for example, 90 pastors were detained in the Kachin province alone, and 50 churches were attacked and destroyed. Other crimes outlined in the report include enforced disappearance, torture, rape and the enslavement of other religious and ethnic minorities in the Christian Kachin and Buddhist Shan states. Will the Leader of the House agree to a statement or a debate on this important matter?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman raises an incredibly important issue that is quite harrowing for all Members across the House. I am aware that a number of right hon. and hon. Members have visited Burma to see for themselves what has been going on there. It is certainly ethnic cleansing, and there seems to be an overwhelming level of evidence for some of the atrocities that he has highlighted. He will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary visited Burma in September to press its leaders to take action, and also convened a meeting in New York later in September to try to galvanise the international response. From a humanitarian and a diplomatic point of view, the UK Government are trying their hardest to get these issues resolved.

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): Each Lent, Nottingham women seeking a termination of pregnancy must run an unacceptable gauntlet of protesters outside the Nottingham treatment centre. We need a

buffer zone, but this has been ruled out by the Home Secretary. May we have a debate in Government time on the harm that this will cause?

Andrea Leadsom: I am very sympathetic to what the hon. Gentleman says. He will be aware that there is a balance of issues on all sides of this debate, and it has been concluded that it is reasonable to have quiet and peaceful objections shown. I think that many hon. Members will have differing views on this, and I encourage him to perhaps seek an Adjournment debate on the subject.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): May we have an urgent statement—as soon as someone is appointed as Secretary of State—on the mistreatment of young people with epilepsy by the Department for Work and Pensions? My constituent suffered an intermittent epileptic seizure, which is an unpredictable part of his condition, and could not attend his assessment, but he has now had his personal independence payment stopped. This is surely a callous system that needs to be turned around. Could the situation be looked at, particularly in relation to young people with epilepsy, who are being disadvantaged?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady raises what sounds like a terrible constituency issue—she is absolutely right to do so. She will be aware that we have Work and Pensions questions on Monday 19 November, and I encourage her to raise this matter with Ministers then.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): The outgoing Clerk of the House is a great champion of the London living wage, which is paid here in Parliament. May we have a debate in Government time on the excellent scheme here in Parliament, given that some of our publicity is not so excellent? That might also encourage other employers to pay the London living wage, when they can, to entry-level employees.

Andrea Leadsom: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for raising that issue. She is right to suggest that we are not all bad, and that the paying of the London living wage is a significant positive for this place. There are many more areas in which Parliament leads the way or aspires to do so, and I share her enthusiasm for having a debate on that subject. She might like to raise the matter directly with Ministers at Question Time, or perhaps seek a Westminster Hall debate so that other colleagues can share their views on the importance of paying the London living wage.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): My constituent's husband died 11 days before she became eligible to apply for indefinite leave to remain. I wrote to the Home Secretary on 20 July to ask for a meeting with him about that case, but I have still not had that meeting. I wrote to him about another constituent, Mr Moneke, on 5 June, 20 July and again on 9 November to ask for a meeting to discuss that case. Could the Leader of the House please nudge the Home Secretary and ask him to meet me about those two cases?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to raise important constituency matters here, and I will be happy to write to the Home Secretary on her behalf.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): Since my election, it has been a joy and an inspiration to get to know the Alive and Kicking project, which plays a vital role in the service of elderly and disabled people in my constituency, in the north-east of Glasgow. Indeed, Madam Deputy Speaker, it was opened by one of your predecessors, Michael Martin, on 15 December 1988, which was a month and a day before I was born. For the last 30 years it has been led by Anne Marie Robertson and Eulalia Stewart. It has been recognised at a national level, including with a Queen's award for voluntary service in 2008. Will the Leader of the House join me in thanking and congratulating Alive and Kicking on its excellent work as it celebrates its pearl anniversary, and will she consider granting a debate on the excellent work that voluntary organisations such as Alive and Kicking do to prevent social exclusion and to involve our elderly people in the later stages of their lives?

Andrea Leadsom: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman raises this wonderful charity, Alive and Kicking, which has obviously been alive and kicking since before he was, although he is very much alive and kicking these days, to extend that analogy. I absolutely share his enthusiasm for all the fantastic charities that do so much, particularly for people who might be vulnerable, elderly or with disabilities. I am absolutely happy to join him in praising them. He might like to seek an Adjournment debate so that he can talk more about what they are doing for his community.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call Gareth Snell.

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker—what a surprise to be called. *[Interruption.]* It is lovely to have friends, isn't it?

In her answers to other questions, not least that from the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh), the Leader of the House rightly outlined what may happen should this House decide not to endorse the deal that has been brought forward. She rightly says that if the House rejects that deal, the Government cannot bring forward the European Union withdrawal implementation Bill. However, under section 13(4) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, the Government would have to bring forward a statement within 21 days to outline their intentions. Could I encourage the Leader of the House to take back to the Prime Minister and the Cabinet the point that, while it may be their prerogative to take 21 days, bringing that statement forward as soon as possible after any vote would be in the national interest and would allow the businesses in our constituencies to do some planning, without waiting until potentially the new year?

Andrea Leadsom: I certainly note what the hon. Gentleman says. He will appreciate that the instructions of the House are the instructions that were given in this place through the withdrawal Bill. However, the Government are clearly trying to be as collegiate as possible across the House to try to get the best possible deal for the UK as we leave the EU. I will certainly make sure that his thoughts are passed on.

Point of Order

2.13 pm

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I raise two gentle points of order, which are linked to yesterday's *Official Report*?

At column 6WS, under Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, there is the heading "Policy". It would be helpful if, in the electronic record, which can be accessed online, the words "Fixed odds betting terminals" were put in. At the moment, "Policy" could mean almost anything, and those who are searching for a history of the change in the limits on fixed odds betting terminals might be helped by that addition. Could I ask that that might be considered?

The second point is slightly different. At column 322, at the end of points of order, Mr Speaker said:

"If there are no further points of order, perhaps we can now proceed."—*[Official Report, 14 November 2018; Vol. 649, c. 322.]* However, the same paragraph goes on to him reading out the letter from Sir David Natzler, the Clerk of the House. I wonder whether, in the electronic record, that might be split, and that there might be a separate heading so that those who want to look for that could find it more easily.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the hon. Gentleman for that point of order, and I will certainly feed back his comments to *Hansard*.

Veterans Strategy

[*Relevant Documents: Ninth Report of the Defence Committee, Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2017, HC 707, and the Government Response, HC 1571, and Eleventh Report of the Defence Committee, Mental Health and the Armed Forces, Part One: The scale of mental health issues, HC 813, and the Government Response, HC 1635.*]

2.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Veterans Strategy.

Before embarking on this important subject, which I am very pleased to get to, perhaps I can just reflect on the debate we have just had on Brexit and our relationship with the European Union. Whatever happens, and whatever our relationship with the European Union, Britain must and will continue to play a pivotal role on the international stage, especially when we are seeing threats diversify and become more complex, added to the fact that we are testing the limits of our planet. Very few nations have the ability and desire to step forward to help shape the world around them. Whatever ID card we end up having in our back pockets, we must remain a nation with tier 1 capabilities—with that full-spectrum defence posture—and able to protect our people, defend our interests and, of course, promote prosperity. I hope we will gain the full support of the House as we make the case in the forthcoming spending review for a strong defence capability.

It is appropriate to reflect on this weekend's events, which are very much in our minds. The nation paused to give thanks to a previous generation, which stepped forward to defend our values, our shores and our way of life. The numbers are difficult to contemplate in today's context. Lord Kitchener's call, "Your country needs you", went out to an entire generation. Six million Britons were mobilised. I had the opportunity to visit the Bournemouth grammar school in my constituency on Friday, before the anniversary of the armistice. I learned that 600 children had lied about their age in order to sign up for the cause—to sign up to defend Britain. One hundred of them did not return.

Also prior to the anniversary of the armistice, I had the honour of visiting the cemetery at Tyne Cot—the hill that was fought over in the third battle of Ypres. Those who have visited this incredible cemetery will know that there are 12,000 war graves there, two thirds of which do not have names on. Around the walls are 34,000 more names of those who were never found—the soldiers there is no gravestone for. That shows the scale of what happened a century ago, when an entire nation was mobilised.

War then was not glorious, as we thought it might be. It provided new tactics and a different approach to our armed forces, which we see in many ways today. There was also a focus on something that we absolutely recognise today: post-combat care. Many of the household names that we are familiar with—Combat Stress, Blesma, SSAFA, the Royal British Legion and even the poppy appeal—all stem from the first world war. SSAFA actually goes back further than that, to the Egyptian campaign.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): The Minister is raising a very important issue, but I think that it has sometimes led us astray in our diagnosis. A lot of work done recently suggests that people who have been diagnosed as suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder have actually suffered a blow to the head. We would do far better to treat them for that and to provide neuro-rehabilitation than to treat them for post-traumatic stress disorder. Does the Minister recognise that?

Mr Ellwood: I do recognise that. If I may, I will come on to that. I am simply making the point that this was the first time there was a recognition of shell shock—post-traumatic stress disorder. These were names that did not really apply then. There was not a full understanding of what was going on with our troops, but there was a recognition by the nation that we had to look after our returning troops in one form or another. There was a duty of care, which is what we are focusing on today.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): What the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) is referring to is often described in the United States as mild traumatic brain injury, or MTBI. We have done a lot of research in this country, but if we are honest, the Americans are a bit ahead of us on this. As the Minister will know, it is often very difficult to diagnose accurately what is PTSD and what is MTBI. I welcome the fact that the hon. Gentleman has raised this issue in the Chamber, and I say to the Minister that we probably need more research in this area to devise the best possible balance of treatment.

Mr Ellwood: I am building up to that but, to respond directly, it is important to share an understanding of what we are doing. I had the pleasure of attending the Invictus games in Sydney, which is such an illustration of how those who are injured, whether mentally or physically, find a new chapter. They are unconquered. They are moving forward with their lives successfully.

At the same time, in the margins of those events, we brought together all the Veterans Ministers of the "Five Eyes" community to share knowledge. The American team presented studies on suicide prevention, on blast injury and on mental health. It is interesting to see how we can compare notes, pick up ideas and share best practice, which is so important. Indeed, I was pleased to sign a memorandum of understanding to make sure that we share our knowledge and provide the best possible support for our veterans.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): We should put on the record in *Hansard* our thanks to Prince Harry for ensuring that the Invictus games have become a reality. As happens all too often, the recognition of his initiative has perhaps been lost, and it would be good for the House to reflect that the Invictus games started through his efforts, his energy and his interest.

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The whole House, indeed the nation, is indebted to the efforts of Prince Harry, who once again was able to come to the games, which are his creation. The Invictus Games Foundation has now got into a steady drumbeat of bringing together people from across the world every second year, and I am pleased to say that we will now hold a domestic event in the interim years, which again

is all about bringing together and supporting those, whether they are in the armed forces or are veterans, who need to be given support to move forward. This has been hugely successful.

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): On Monday I had the privilege of launching the “Walking Home for Christmas” campaign with Invictus games medallists. The campaign, with Help for Heroes and Walking with the Wounded, is targeted at veterans whom we struggle to support over the Christmas period, when they are at their most vulnerable. Does the Minister agree that it is at this point that we need to honour the covenant and make sure that we not only respect those who served during world war one and world war two but now remember those who served more recently?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Lady makes a valid point. The Ministry of Defence works with Help for Heroes and the Royal British Legion on making the Invictus games a reality and in pushing forward Prince Harry’s vision.

The hon. Lady is also right to illustrate the changing requirements of our veterans. The profile will change. Over the next 10 years, the numbers will move from 2.5 million to 1.5 million, and many of the latter will be veterans from the Afghan and Iraq campaigns. Indeed, they do not even call themselves veterans, which is interesting—they see themselves as ex-forces, leaving the veteran label to national service and second world war personnel. Either way, she is right that that support should be there.

None of this was in place when I departed the regular forces. I do not mean to say that we have got it right—it is a moving force that morphs as we develop—but I am pleased that we have the building blocks to advance our support for veterans. The 10-year strategy is based on the covenant, which the hon. Lady mentioned. The covenant is often raised in Parliament, and it is the nation’s commitment to making sure that anybody who has served is not hindered by their service or held back because of what they have done. That message needs to go out to every single Department, not just those in and around the MOD. It can be tricky for a Department that perhaps is not military facing to be aware of its responsibilities to veterans and armed forces personnel.

Our second pillar of support is the veterans board, chaired by the Prime Minister or the Deputy Prime Minister, which brings together the Secretaries of State of the various Departments so that local government is held to account. I encourage every Member of Parliament to visit their local authority and ask, “Who is your veterans champion? Who is the person who will help to challenge or deal with matters of homelessness and housing?” The veterans champion will be the focal point in their area.

Ruth Smeeth: I met a veteran earlier this week who went to his local authority to say that he was homeless and needed support. He had been out of service for four months, and he was told that there were others in the queue who were more relevant, including refugees who had just arrived. He ended up homeless and was supported by Help for Heroes. Does that not suggest that local government is still not fulfilling its obligations under the covenant?

Mr Ellwood: I do not know to which local authority the hon. Lady is referring. If she would like to write to me with the details, I would be more than happy to look into the matter. She is absolutely right. Like many other aspects of national government, we are seeing different standards across the country, and often it is to do with the historical relationship that a local authority has had with the military.

We would expect Portsmouth to get this right, because of the longevity of its relationship with the military, likewise Staffordshire, with the arboretum. In Bournemouth, in my own constituency, this is not something that comes naturally, because Bournemouth is a very new town with no relationship with the armed forces, but that should not prevent it from being aware of its duties in honouring the armed forces covenant.

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister rightly mentions Staffordshire. In North Staffordshire we have the tri-services and veterans support centre, which provides in-community pastoral support and experienced services for ex-service personnel who live across Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire. The centre is currently in a building owned by Staffordshire County Council. Does he agree it is important that such services are protected and safeguarded, and that it is the duty of local authorities to make sure that such services continue for the long term? Without them, problems will arise in the acute sector, which is not good for anyone.

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Gentleman makes his point clearly. We want every local authority to recognise what its duties are to help our brave veterans. The more we can do that via the veterans board, the better it will be. In these discussions we are illustrating the variety of support that veterans receive, whether it be from charities, local authorities or, indeed, Government Departments—

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr Ellwood: I was about to finish my sentence, but of course I will give way.

Sir Peter Bottomley: I apologise. I thought there was a full stop. I am embarrassed.

If local authority veterans champions, who in my constituency include Terence Chapman of Arun District Council and Tom Wye of Worthing Borough Council, and others were encouraged to make known the kinds of things they are doing—obviously preserving confidentiality in individual cases—more people would know what is available and to whom they can refer if there is a problem. The key task is to make sure there is not a problem so that the veterans champions do not have to be brought in because the covenant is built into what local authorities are doing.

Mr Ellwood: My hon. Friend is right. It should be the mindset, the *modus operandi*, of any local authority. It should be very clear who the armed forces champion is—it should be on the local authority website so that people know who to go to.

Many types of support are available for veterans. A veteran may be in a very dark place when they seek support, and the last thing we need is a confusing picture

[Mr Ellwood]

as to where that support can be found. Charities have been mentioned, as have local authorities and national government. Each plays a role, and we have established the veterans gateway to provide a single portal where any individual can make a phone call or go online to seek the necessary help to guide them to where they need to go.

Again, this is in its infancy. We have 400 service-facing charities, not all of which are signed up to the gateway. We want them all to sign up. The big ones have signed up, but they are also running their own call centres. Either way, we need this to work. We need this to be the vehicle, the single portal, for any veteran who requires help. When I refer to help, it is not necessarily physical support—it might be help in looking for more employment or in setting up their own initiative—but this is where they need to go.

Chris Bryant *rose*—

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Gentleman is poised.

Chris Bryant: I wasn't, actually, but the Minister has enticed me. I agree with everything he has said, and my local council is determined to do everything it can, because we send a lot of young men and women from the Rhondda into the armed forces. However, I just wonder whether there is something the Government need to do as a prior step, which is to check for brain injury the moment somebody joins up. There is strong evidence now to suggest that kids from poorer backgrounds are four times more likely to have a significant brain injury either in their teenage years or before the age of five. Once they have had one brain injury, they will have another. If we could screen everybody coming into the armed forces, we might be able to provide a better standard of living.

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Gentleman makes a serious point. First, let me say that screening does take place; medicals are done to make sure that people are fit for service. He touches on a science that is still evolving, and which I have only just started to learn about. Someone who is subject to a blast injury might stand up and walk away from it, but be unaware that their DNA has been shunted in some way that could have long-term impacts. We are still coming to terms with recognising that, and we need to advance our understanding of it. The Royal Foundation, which is supported by Prince Harry and Prince William, is providing funding for us to look into this and get a better understanding of what is happening. That goes along with our studies with the Forces in Mind Trust. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to highlight something that understanding brain injuries is pivotal, particularly if they happen prior to someone's signing up or on the battlefield.

Ruth Smeeth: Is the Minister aware that Blind Veterans UK has initiated some research in this area to see what the difference is between PTSD and brain injury?

Mr Ellwood: We could almost have our own debate on this issue, first because of its importance and secondly because we are talking about exactly the sort of advancement we need to undertake to look after and care for our veterans.

Let me move from the detail and step back to the wider support we provide to our armed forces. I have mentioned the armed forces covenant as the overall policy and the Veterans Board getting Departments working together. We also have the gateway, and Cobseo, the Confederation of Service Charities, is doing a far better job of bringing together like-minded charities to work together. They are now working on cluster lines, so the employment cluster is bringing the relevant charities together and the same is happening for housing and mental health. They are doing far better work in co-ordinating their activities, as has been touched on.

Another strand or building block, which we have sort of skirted over so far, is our entire mental health strategy. I look back at my own time serving, when even a mention of any form of mental injury was a no-no; people did not raise it whatsoever, not just in the armed forces but in society. We are now seeing a far more open-minded approach to this issue, whereby people are putting their hand up and saying, "Yes, I have had a problem with this." If people do that at an early stage, help can be brought in and it can prevent problems from incubating.

Our new approach is encouraging parity between physical and mental injury, so that we promote better practice and tackle the stigma attached to mental health, which helps prevention in the first place. We are also getting better at detection. Whether someone is a platoon commander or a ship commander, they are encouraging people to step forward and look out for mental ill health, and then the individual involved or a friend of theirs may put their hand up. We are saying, "Put your hand up, get yourself checked out. It is okay to do so. It is okay to say you are not okay. Get it treated. Get it sorted. Get yourself back on the frontline, without fear that you are going to be affected in your promotion or long-term prospects in the armed forces."

Mr Francois: As the Minister may know, although some in the House may not, the Royal Marines developed trauma risk management—TRIM—which has been so successful that it is now taught across the whole of the armed forces. The essential thing about it is that someone's mates absolve them, saying, "Look, Bill, we can see you're struggling, mate. It could happen to any of us. It's happening to you. Let's not pretend. Let's go and see the medical officer and get some help." Will the Minister confirm to the House that that has been an extremely successful policy, meaning it is now easier for people to be honest about what they are going through?

Mr Ellwood: My right hon. Friend makes such a valid point, and it is not just Bill, but Belinda and everybody else. It applies not only to those in uniform but to the armed forces fraternity as a whole—it is the families as well. They may be the first people to pick up on the fact that something is not quite right. In my time, people held back and kept this to themselves, but it would incubate and then they would leave the thing they loved. It then became an issue for a veterans charity or the NHS, because people had not dealt with it from the earliest point. My right hon. Friend rightly points out that TRIM was developed in the Marines, who got it from the United States, and it is now being rolled out as better practice right across the armed forces.

The veterans strategy is about bringing all those things together. It is about looking forward and having a 10-year vision of a cross-government approach. I am pleased to say that it has the support of all the devolved Administrations. It is so important that we can let veterans and their families have a full understanding of what to expect from the armed forces and other agencies for the rest of their lives. The strategy is also about promoting and celebrating what our armed forces do; we need to tell people about their success stories. We have not been particularly good at that. We also need to promote the fact of what those in our armed forces actually do.

I was struck by a phone call I had with my mother, in which we talked about her father—my grandfather. I remember sitting on his knee and him talking about the battle of Passchendaele. I could not even say the word, as I was only four or five at the time, but I remember it because he showed me his medals. I had a personal connection with somebody who fought in the first world war. My two little boys do not have that connection, as there is now a distance. The cohort of people who are directly connected to armed forces personnel today has shrunk considerably from what it was at the time of the first world war, when an entire generation—every village, town and city—was affected. Everyone knew somebody who had been injured or killed, and they knew people who had survived. We need to make sure that there is not a skewed view of what it is like to be in our armed forces.

I make it clear that someone who serves in our armed forces will come out a stronger, better person, but obviously some people require help. Some of the things we see on TV, with “Bodyguard” being the latest example, give the impression that if people serve, they may be mentally affected. What does that do to the reputation of the armed forces? What does it do to a potential recruit if they get the idea that they might be mentally affected if they join the armed forces? It hinders them in signing up. What does it do to do an employer that does not have exposure to or knowledge of what it is like being in the armed forces? It gives them a bias against signing up someone who has military experience. Veterans themselves might also hold a stigma about this because they have served. We need to change that. We need to be very proud of these people—particularly in Britain, because of the professionalism of our armed forces.

That brings me back to promoting and celebrating what our armed forces actually do, and we are going to push that forward through a consultation paper. The veterans strategy has now been published—it was issued yesterday, and there will now be a consultation lasting 12 weeks, in all corners of the country, to address how we implement it. It will deal with how we put this work into practice, which will be slightly different in different places. We are all aware of the challenges in Northern Ireland, where a very different approach needs to be taken from that in other parts of the country. I look forward to getting feedback from individual Members, as well as from charities, councils, academics, service providers and veterans communities themselves, on how we can make this work.

Extra funding has come through from the Budget; we have an extra £2 billion for the NHS mental health budget and £100 million for the rough sleeping strategy—

that must obviously include the veterans aspect of the issue, which we have touched on. There is a further £10 million in the covenant fund trust, from which individual charities and organisations can bid for further funding to promote their own schemes and so forth. We have also developed specialist support, through the veterans’ mental health and wellbeing fund and, in England—this is a mouthful—through the veterans’ mental health transition, intervention and liaison service, which provides specialist locations where mental health issues can be looked at.

Jim Shannon: The Minister has referred to the regions and what more can be done. Will there be money set aside for the regions specifically?

Mr Ellwood: I had the pleasure of attending the Remembrance Day commemorations in Belfast at the weekend, and I took the opportunity to visit a veterans charity and to speak about how we can activate and invigorate the covenant over there. I also met some of the hon. Gentleman’s Northern Ireland colleagues, and I will be going there very soon to bring stakeholders together, because I appreciate that there is a different picture over there. We need to work closely at the grassroots level, but we will create a plan to implement the strategy in a way that meets Northern Ireland’s specific needs.

I am pre-empting the Opposition spokesperson, but we need better data. We need to know who our veterans are and whether our GPs are helping them, and we need to understand particular challenges such as suicide and so forth. We are now looking at ways of making that happen and working with the Ministry of Justice so that we can better track what is going on. We check with our veterans 12 months after they have departed the armed forces, and they already go through a transition package, often lasting two years, to make sure they are equipped. As I well remember, moving from the armed forces, where one feels part of a family, a unit, a community, a tribe, and into the wide open world is quite a culture shock, and we need to be there for veterans. We cannot just give them up. Some 90% of those who go through the transition service are in education or employment within six months of their departure.

I hope that I have illustrated my passion, and that of the ministerial team I am pleased to see here supporting me, for the veterans strategy. The Defence Secretary shares that passion and very much wants it to work. We are advancing our support for the armed forces community. To those thinking of a career in the armed forces, I say: I encourage you. You will do things you never thought you would do, you will learn things about your character you never thought you would learn, and when you march on the parade square for the very first time, you will make your mum and dad very proud as you begin to represent the nation. To those serving, in both the regulars and reserves, and to their families, I say: thank you for your service. You allow us to say we have the most professional armed forces in the world. And to our brave veterans—I mentioned Kitchener saying 100 years ago, “Your country needs you”—I simply say: your country owes you. We owe you a debt of gratitude and support for the rest of your lives.

2.42 pm

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): Before I start, I must apologise. I might be a little croaky today, but I will do the best I can.

I am pleased that the Government have scheduled a debate on the veterans strategy in Government time. It is vital that we recognise the unstinting service of our brave armed forces men and women and ensure that the best opportunities are available to help them transition into civilian life. This is first and foremost important for veterans themselves, their partners and children, but it also benefits our wider society if their skills are used to best advantage.

Many veterans transition successfully into civilian life, but we want easily accessible early intervention and support services for the veterans who need them. Moreover, we should aim high and be ambitious for our veterans. We want to see the best possible opportunities and the smoothest possible transition to civilian life for all our veterans. Let us not forget that delays in obtaining suitable housing, accessing appropriate educational opportunities and getting a job also have a detrimental impact on veterans' families.

I welcome the Government's publication of a veterans strategy, but, as we all know, this is only a first step. There will now be a consultation. Then what will really matter will be the implementation of the strategy, its outcomes and how it actually improves the lives of veterans. I do not doubt that the Minister and his team are committed to improving provision for veterans, but there has to be a genuine cross-governmental approach. As the strategy explains, the vast majority of services for veterans are delivered through Departments other than the MOD. It is not enough for the Government simply to establish the ministerial covenant and veterans board. There must be a genuine commitment from the Treasury to ensure that the necessary funding is provided to local councils, health services, housing providers, further education colleges and the devolved Administrations, so that they can all deliver high-quality services for our veterans.

Time and again, there seems to be a complete disconnect between the warm words of Ministers about their concern for veterans and the way they vote in Parliament, as if the problems have nothing to do with the cuts and policies they have voted for, and as if it was not they who voted to slash council budgets by 50%; who have cut further education funding by over £3 billion in real terms since 2010—25% of all FE funding; who have broken the link between inflation and benefits for the first time ever; who introduced the bedroom tax; and who have not built the affordable homes needed to end the housing crisis. Fewer new homes for social rent were built last year than in any year since records began. It is often as a direct result of those decisions that veterans are left homeless, unable to access courses to help them into a new job, waiting too long for health care, getting into financial difficulties and even sadly ending up in the criminal justice system. Estimates on the number of homeless veterans vary.

Mr Francois: I apologise, but as the hon. Lady has introduced a note of partisanship into this debate, I have to ask her something. Last Thursday, I took part in a debate on LBC with a vile man called Aaron Bastani, who is a close associate of the Leader of the

Opposition. During that debate, he said, first, that the poppy was a militaristic symbol and that it was racist to wear it, secondly, that the Royal British Legion should be abolished and, thirdly, that celebrating the Invictus games was like

“putting lipstick on a pig”.

As I understand it, this man is a member of the Labour party. Will the shadow Secretary of State condemn unequivocally those remarks and assure the House that he will be thrown out of the Labour party without delay?

Nia Griffith: As I have already said on air—it is on the record—I absolutely deplore that man's comments. I reassure Members from all parties that he holds no position of office in the Labour party, that he is not an elected representative, and that he in no way represents the views of my colleagues, many of whom were at their local war memorials up and down the country on Sunday morning, wearing their poppies very proudly. The man is an utter disgrace and I have called on him to retract completely what he said. It is up to the party authorities to consider further action in his case.

Let me go back to homeless veterans. Estimates of the number of homeless veterans vary, but it is truly shameful that anyone who served this country should find himself or herself on the streets. This Conservative Government must take responsibility for their failure to deal with the problem. Rough sleeping has doubled since 2010, and homelessness is a direct consequence of the Government's decisions on housing and welfare reform and their unprecedented cuts to local council budgets and charities. We cannot deal with homelessness unless we build more homes that are affordable to rent or to buy. Labour is committed to dealing with homeless veterans through our comprehensive plan to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping. As we have announced, we would make 8,000 affordable homes available for people with a history of sleeping on the streets, and a Labour Government would build 100,000 affordable homes a year—homes that are affordable to rent and homes that are affordable to buy.

Despite the severe cuts imposed on councils by the Conservative Government, many councils are trying to improve their provision for veterans. I wish to share with the House some examples of the Labour council initiatives to provide homes for veterans, which I have had the privilege of visiting. Cardiff Council has worked with the housing organisation Trivallis and the Welsh Veterans Partnership to deliver a new housing development in Cardiff bay. It is made up of 152 properties, of which at least 15% are allocated to veterans and their families. The Welsh Veterans Partnership also provides help with employment, education and healthcare. It is clear that this multi-agency approach is beneficial to the resettlement and wellbeing of veterans and their families.

I have also visited the Nelson Project, which is part of Labour-controlled Plymouth City Council's award-winning plan for homes, an £80 million investment to increase the quality and supply of new housing in the city. The project enabled ex-service personnel themselves to help to build a 24-home site, thereby providing them with construction training and other valuable job-based skills. Thanks to that initiative, many have subsequently found work in the construction industry.

Armed forces personnel develop a whole range of skills, and it is vital that those skills are tradeable in civilian life. I know that some work has been done to link the skills people gain while serving in the armed forces to recognised qualifications, but there needs to be a comprehensive system of recognition and equivalence to established qualifications, so that veterans themselves value the skills they have and employers recognise those skills when recruiting. We also need comprehensive provision throughout the country to enable former armed forces personnel to improve their employment chances by enhancing their existing skills or learning new ones. In the fast-changing world we live in, even what we learn today can be out of date by next year, and people may need to retrain or upskill more than once during their working lives. That is why we on the Labour Benches are so committed to lifelong learning. As we set out in our manifesto last year, we will introduce free, lifelong education, delivered through further education colleges, to enable everyone, including veterans, to upskill or retrain at any point in life. That is in sharp contrast to the Government's cuts to adult education. Of course, one way in which former personnel can gain valuable skills is through apprenticeships. Labour has also made a commitment to set targets to increase the number of veterans who are able to take advantage of such opportunities.

Labour Members also support a guaranteed-interview scheme for veterans, in which former service personnel who meet the minimum requirements for a job would be guaranteed an interview. Some local authorities, such as Labour's North Tyneside Council, already operate such schemes, and we are keen to see them rolled out throughout the country as a practical way to help veterans with the transition from the services into employment.

Let me turn to mental health. As I have already said, the overwhelming majority of personnel transition into civilian life without any difficulty, so we must challenge any negative stereotype that serving in the forces leaves personnel in some way broken. That is clearly not the case, and I was pleased to see that the veterans strategy makes reference to the work that is needed to challenge the public perception of veterans and to dispel unhelpful myths. At the same time, proper support must be available for those former service personnel who require access to mental health support. The effects and consequences of mental health problems can be devastating.

Earlier this year, the Defence Committee found:

"It is still taking too long for veterans to access treatment when they need it, and levels of care vary across the UK."

There is particular concern that the guarantee contained in the armed forces covenant—that veterans should receive priority treatment if it relates to a condition that results from their service in the armed forces—is caveated by the phrase "according to clinical need". The reality is that any meaningful prioritisation is near impossible when waiting times are often far too long, even for urgent cases. The fact is that our mental health services are under considerable pressure, with funding cut by more than 8% since 2010 and the number of mental health nurses down by 6,600.

The strategy aspires to better collaboration and co-ordination of veterans' services, although there is little suggestion as to how that might be achieved. I am also a little disappointed that the strategy does not do enough to tackle the thorny issue of keeping track of

veterans. It is not straightforward because, while some veterans will want to maintain contact with their previous employment through one of the many military organisations, others may not. We need a discussion about the usefulness and the practicality of keeping in touch with veterans.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I declare an interest as my husband is a veteran and a veterans' champion. Professional services need to become available, but veterans themselves have great skills in understanding the experiences that other veterans have had. I wonder whether Members across the House could come together to agree that peer-to-peer support would also be extremely important for veterans and to support the funding of that moving forward.

Nia Griffith: The hon. Lady makes a valuable contribution to this debate. We would certainly want to look into that.

The strategy does not really consider whether parts of the armed forces covenant should be statutory and not simply aspirational. It does not propose a strategy to develop and maintain greater consistency across all sectors of our public services. The Minister has rightly expressed concern that there is patchiness across the country. There are some fabulous examples of things really working well, but that is not always consistent. There is a debate to be had about the degree to which Government should intervene. Potentially we should be thinking about making some things statutory. Perhaps there should be some requirements to improve consistency across the country.

This morning, I visited the charity Veterans Aid. It is clear from its work that veterans can and do experience many of the same socioeconomic challenges that are faced by society at large—challenges caused by eight years of the Government's austerity programme. Indeed, among the support that Veterans Aid has provided in the last year is emergency food and money for clothing, needs arising from the problems that many of us see all too often across our communities. It beggars belief that, in 2018, anyone—veteran or otherwise—should need that kind of assistance, but we know that the use of food banks has skyrocketed under this Government.

To be clear, the point is not that veterans specifically are reliant on emergency funds from charities, but rather that it is the political decisions made by the Conservative party since 2010 to slash social security and to impose measures such as the bedroom tax that mean that the real issue is poverty. It is all very well having a strategy that identifies ways to support veterans, but we cannot divorce that from the context of eight years of Conservative cuts. So let us have a proper joined-up approach across Government which increases funding for mental health services, funds lifelong learning and builds more affordable housing. That is what is needed for our veterans and, if this Conservative Government cannot deliver it, a Labour Government will.

2.58 pm

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this important debate about how we should best look after veterans who have given so much in the service of their country.

[Mr Mark Francois]

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith), who is acknowledged by the House as someone who knows a lot about this subject. We are grateful for her remarks. It is a particular pleasure to participate in a debate with a Minister who is passionately committed to the support of veterans and who is respected across the House of Commons as a result. We know where his heart lies and we respect him for it.

I offer apologies to the House for my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), who chairs the Defence Committee. Ordinarily he would have spoken in such a debate, but unfortunately he had an unbreakable commitment today. He has asked me to make a particular point in his absence about war widows. There is a key flaw in the current policy around war widows, which is that if someone's spouse died or left military or war service after 31 March 1973 and before 5 April 2005, and the widow remarried or cohabited, they were required to surrender their war pension or compensation. A majority in that group are the widows of soldiers who were killed during the troubles. They have had to deal with not only the loss of their spouse, but the financial hardship that has been caused to many widows who have wanted to move on with their lives in new relationships. On behalf of my right hon. Friend, I sincerely ask the Minister to give us a commitment that he will at least reflect on this issue and see whether there is more that the Government can do.

I have also been asked to pass on apologies from my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison), who cannot be with us today. I think that the whole House would acknowledge that he has done a tremendous job as the Prime Minister's representative for the commemoration of world war one. My hon. Friend has asked me to make a brief point in his absence about the new centre for conflict wound research. He knows a lot about that subject, because a few years ago he undertook a report for the Prime Minister on the treatment of those who have suffered injuries, particularly to their limbs. The new centre for conflict wound research opened on Tuesday at Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham. It has been sensibly located close to the Defence and National Rehabilitation Centre at Stanford Hall, which has absorbed the old Headley Court in Surrey.

The case for moving Headley to the midlands was underpinned by the promise of closer NHS and defence medical services collaboration, so that military and civilian patients and researchers could benefit holistically from complex trauma experience. However, the NHS has not fully engaged with the same enthusiasm as the military, which means that the original vision is falling short. Will the Minister liaise with his colleagues in the Department of Health to see whether something can be done to put this right? The more we learn about treating such wounds and the better we become at dealing with prosthetics, the more that that will benefit civilian NHS patients, as well as, obviously, veterans. It is literally a win-win.

In many ways, this is a timely debate, not least because it comes a few days after the nation paid tribute to its war dead and wounded in the centenary of the armistice, to which the Minister rightly referred in his excellent speech. I believe that this event really captured the

imagination of the British people, with ceremonies held the length and breadth of the United Kingdom—from the ceremony at the Cenotaph right down to individual commemorations in villages and parishes around the nation in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In my constituency of Rayleigh and Wickford, I attended four services that day, including the lighting of a centenary beacon in the evening, and I know that many colleagues on both sides of the House will have done the same. As an aside, I know that the weather was variable around the country, and that therefore a number of MPs were prepared to get quite wet in the rain to pay their respects, unlike some other prominent people on the world stage.

In Rayleigh, people across the community have been working for many months to produce 12,000 knitted poppies, which were put together to create a waterfall effect around Holy Trinity church in the town centre. People came from far and wide—much to the delight of local traders—to see this wonderful tribute. Let me take this opportunity to place on record my sincere appreciation to all those involved from my constituency and beyond, including the redoubtable Rayleigh women's institute, the Hockley and Hawkwell day centre, and the mother of my PA, Adele Jacquin—it is always good to read your staff into the record, Madam Deputy Speaker—who lives in Cheltenham and also knitted poppies for the display. I have often been proud to be the Member of Parliament for Rayleigh and Wickford, but I do not think I have ever been as proud as when I saw that commemorative waterfall unveiled.

At the Remembrance Sunday service, our local rector, the Rev. David Oxtoby, chose to read an extremely fitting poem, "It is the Soldier" by Charles M. Province. It is a brief poem, so I will share it with the House because I think it is apposite:

"It is the Soldier, not the minister
Who has given us freedom of religion.
It is the Soldier, not the reporter
Who has given us freedom of the press.
It is the Soldier, not the poet
Who has given us freedom of speech.
It is the Soldier, not the campus organizer
Who has given us freedom to protest.
It is the Soldier, not the lawyer
Who has given us the right to a fair trial.
It is the Soldier, not the politician
Who has given us the right to vote.
It is the Soldier who salutes the flag,
Who serves beneath the flag,
And whose coffin is draped by the flag,
Who allows the protester to burn the flag."

I humbly submit to the House that when we are talking about veterans, that is a fitting tribute.

As well as those who fell in battle, we must remember those who survive and are now veterans of their military service. The question we must ask is: are we doing enough for these people, to whom we owe so much? The Defence Committee is in the middle of an inquiry into veterans' mental health, to which the hon. Member for Llanelli referred. It is constructive to compare what we do for the physical rehabilitation of veterans with what we do for their psychological rehabilitation.

For physical rehabilitation, we have world-class facilities—formerly at Headley Court, and now at the Defence and National Rehabilitation Centre at Stanford Hall. In addition, veterans who have lost their legs can now be fitted with the Genium prosthetic—arguably the most advanced prosthetic limb in the world—following a grant of more than £6 million from Her Majesty's Treasury to equip all those veterans who lost their legs either in Iraq or in Afghanistan. I am proud to say that I had a little to do with that when I served in the Minister of Defence.

In mental health services for veterans, however, we are not world class, and there is much further to go. For example, on Tuesday the Committee took evidence from academics and health professionals from around the UK that revealed, among other things, that in parts of Wales and Northern Ireland, it takes almost a year for a veteran who is identified as suffering from mental illness to begin to receive appropriate treatment. That is bad enough for anyone, but for those who have served their country in uniform, it is completely and utterly unacceptable.

One of the challenges in that sphere arises from what could be described as conflict between two different philosophies—the hon. Lady mentioned this as well. On the one hand, we have the armed forces covenant, the two key principles of which are enshrined in law within the Armed Forces Act 2011. The second key principle is that of special treatment where appropriate, especially for the wounded or bereaved. Under that principle and the broader armed forces covenant, veterans should receive priority treatment under the national health service. However, when one asks the NHS, one gets a very different answer: patients will be treated strictly in accordance with clinical need.

A little while ago, we took evidence from the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), who opened the debate, and from his opposite number in the Department of Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price). Unsurprisingly he backed the covenant and she backed the NHS. We need to resolve that dilemma and we need to do so soon.

As well as the NHS, a number of charities do important work in this field, including the Royal British Legion, Help for Heroes, SSAFA—the Armed Forces Charity, and Combat Stress. As part of our inquiry, the Committee plans to visit a residential centre run by Combat Stress early next month.

Another charity that does very valuable work is Care after Combat, which was founded in 2014 by Jim Davidson OBE, a notable comedian who has given a great deal of his personal time to an extremely serious subject. Care after Combat provides struggling veterans who have fallen into the prison system with a mentor, who is usually a veteran themselves, which ensures that they have access to someone with understanding in their first year in prison and then their first year outside. The mentor is often able to have conversations that a GP or probation officer simply would not. They are able to spot mental health warning signs and other issues through more regular contact than a clinician would have, and then to report back accordingly. I would like to see more Government support for what that vital charity seeks to achieve, and I ask the Minister to make a note of that.

I regret to say that there is one area in which the Government are letting down veterans very badly indeed, and that is the whole area of “lawfare” and the legal witch hunting of predominantly Army veterans by others for political or financial gain. This applies to veterans who served in Northern Ireland, Iraq and Afghanistan. In the case of Iraq, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) led the Defence Sub-Committee's inquiry into the Iraq Historic Allegations Team, the revelations of which were so appalling that the then Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Sir Michael Fallon), had the team shut down.

However, the Ministry of Defence then effectively created a son of IHAT, which has continued to inquire into Iraq veterans. We now know that one law firm specialised in bringing cases from Iraq. The ironically named Public Interest Lawyers went so far as to completely fabricate cases against veterans, basically to try to make money out of them. That firm has now mercifully gone bust—no one laments its passing—and its lead lawyer, Mr Phil Shiner, has been struck off.

Other firms acting in this field—not necessarily illegally in any way—have made a great deal of money out of pursuing veterans. One of those is Leigh Day. The Committee hopes to invite representatives of that firm to give evidence to our ongoing inquiry into veterans and “lawfare” to justify their actions to Parliament. If we are successful and they have the courage to appear, I am told that half the Ministry of Defence will take the morning off and come to sit in the Public Gallery—we will need the Boothroyd Room at least. By the way, if they do turn up, they will not receive a fee.

I am afraid that this is also the case in Northern Ireland, where the Northern Ireland Office and the Police Service of Northern Ireland now propose to go right back to 1968—50 years ago—and reinvestigate every single killing that took place in the course of the troubles. The process would be entirely one-sided, because members of the IRA have been given so-called letters of comfort by Tony Blair, meaning they are effectively off the hook. As far as I am aware, no one who has been given a letter of comfort has ever been successfully prosecuted for terrorist offences. I do not say this lightly, but the Northern Ireland Office, which is one short of its complement today, should be ashamed of itself.

Conversely, there are no letters of comfort for Army veterans, only the prospect of being investigated and, in some cases, hounded for things that happened nearly half a century ago. For instance, an inquest has now begun into killings in Ballymurphy in the 1970s. I understand from press reports that pro-republican lawyers are likely to summon up to 100 soldiers to give evidence. That would take an extremely long time and no doubt cost a vast amount of public money. Let us call this what it is. It is a racket, and it has to stop.

As a result, a couple of weeks ago I and a number of ex-Army colleagues in the House helped to organise a letter from 104 Conservative Members of Parliament, supported by some Opposition Members and 50 peers, including General Lord Dannatt and four previous Chiefs of the Defence Staff. The letter, which we delivered to the Prime Minister at No. 10 Downing Street, called on her to put an end to this outrage that has continued on her watch. I am pleased to say that, as a result, we have now been offered a meeting with the Attorney General early next month.

[Mr Mark Francois]

There are now essentially three strands of potential progress. The first is the Defence Committee inquiry, which is ongoing and will probably report sometime in the new year. The second is the specialist team that has been established within the Ministry of Defence by the Defence Secretary—the Minister will be very familiar with it—which is also looking into this issue. The third is the initiative led by the Attorney General, who I am pleased to say has been tasked by the Prime Minister with trying to sort out this problem.

I and other members of the Defence Committee very much hope, perhaps by some combination of these three strands, that we will be able to find a solution so that people who have bravely served their country in uniform will not be hounded in this way in the future. They are people such as Corporal Major Dennis Hutchings, who served several tours on Op Banner in Northern Ireland during the troubles. He is now aged 77, and he is dying of terminal cancer. Unfortunately, it is likely that he will die before his trial for events that were all investigated thoroughly at the time takes place.

There is also the case of Royal Marine David Griffin who, at the age of 77, is facing reinvestigation over an incident in 1972, when someone was killed during an ambush in the middle of the night. The nature of the attack he was under means that Mr Griffin has no idea whether it was he or one of his colleagues who was responsible. An investigation was held 46 years ago, yet Mr Griffin now faces further reinvestigation. And they knew where to find him, because he is a Chelsea Pensioner in the Royal Hospital Chelsea.

We now face a situation in which alleged IRA terrorists, with letters of comfort, are away scot-free—they are laughing at us—while we go after Chelsea Pensioners instead. That is, quite literally, outrageous, and it is happening on this Government's watch. The public, veterans, serving personnel, their families, over 100 MPs and over 50 peers of the realm all believe the same thing—enough is enough! I call on the Government to stop this outrage, and to stop it quickly.

In summary, the centenary of the armistice is a strong reminder of the vast debt we owe our veterans of the past century, and we should give our veterans and their families the best possible support once they have left the service of the Crown. Although, as the Minister rightly said, there has been good progress in many areas, of which the whole House can be proud, there is also one burning injustice: we now seem to be treating terrorists more favourably than Chelsea Pensioners. I ask the Minister—I believe he is with us in spirit, although he cannot say so—to talk to his colleagues in government and for God's sake make this nonsense stop.

3.19 pm

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): It is always a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois). Despite having done so on several occasions, I am never quite sure that I get it right. He always gives a forensic speech, and we are never in any doubt about where he stands on, well, pretty much anything actually. I always welcome his contributions.

I start on a somewhat sad note because the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan) felt the need to resign from her position as Parliamentary Private Secretary in the Ministry of Defence. I think that is a loss to the defence team as she was very good to me and my colleagues when we tried to communicate with Ministers at the MOD. Who knows what lies ahead for her? I think that the consensus between us will perhaps end there for now, as the Brexit debate gets more intense.

I am glad this debate is taking place. I was slightly concerned, given the pressures on time and events this morning, that it would not happen. That would have been a great shame, given that we have just had a whole period of remembrance leading up to Remembrance Sunday at the beginning of the week. It was a pleasure to take part in the main centenary event in George Square in Glasgow city centre on Sunday, which was a very moving affair—the city council confirmed it as the largest remembrance event the city has held in the square for a number of years, which shows the desire there is among Glaswegians properly to remember and show thanks to the armed forces and veterans who have passed in previous wars.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): As my hon. Friend will know, I was not at George Square in Glasgow because I was at the Nitshill war memorial service. It was the first time there has been a main service there, and there were 300 people in attendance and 34 wreaths laid by community groups. The Friends of Nitshill War Memorial committee should be thanked for all their work over the past five months.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: I echo that entirely, and congratulate my hon. Friend on getting that point on the record.

I also had the pleasure of attending the Queen's Park football club remembrance service. It will surprise anybody who knows me to hear that it was ever a pleasure for me to be at a football stadium, but this was a particularly noteworthy affair. As well as holding a remembrance service for football players who served in the first world war, some of whom did not return home, the club put together the Great War Project, which documented the lives of those who had played for Queen's Park football club in my constituency, which is the oldest football club in Scotland. It had invited the families of the football players and soldiers from world war one. I even met a constituent of the now departed Secretary of State for Work and Pensions who was involved in the Scottish National party in 1945. Needless to say, he cannot support us any more from Tatton, but that goes to show the breadth of people that a remembrance event can bring together. I congratulate everybody at Queen's Park football club on putting together the Great War Project, and I look forward to visiting the Great War Project at Langside church in my constituency tomorrow night.

Let me return to the veterans strategy. I genuinely welcome this document, which is a good starting point for a serious discussion. I particularly welcome the fact that on the veterans ministerial board we have Ministers from devolved Governments, in particular Graeme Dey, who is the Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans in the Scottish Government, and the only

veterans Minister in a devolved Government anywhere in the UK—something that other devolved Governments could pick up on. I also welcome to his post the new Scottish Veterans Commissioner, Charles Wallace, who was appointed by the Scottish Government. I think he is the only veterans commissioner in the UK, and he will become a veteran on Tuesday. I had the pleasure of meeting him earlier this week—I think he was in front of the Defence Committee on Tuesday—and I am sure that all Scottish Members wish him well in his new role.

There are obviously many crossovers with devolved competencies as far as supporting veterans is concerned, just as there are with local government. I welcome the £1.3 million announced by the Scottish Government for the veterans fund to support veterans organisations across Scotland. I welcome the £10 million of additional funding for veterans with mental health needs. I also welcome the fact that the Scottish Government changed the rules to ensure that the war disablement pension was exempt from income assessments.

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those involved in organising remembrance events across South Lanarkshire, including South Lanarkshire Council headquarters which lit up its own building to commemorate the anniversary. My constituent Thomas Stuart White from Carlisle currently receives 70% of his war disablement pension and a lifetime award of disability living allowance. However, he was only granted a three-year personal independence payment and he feels it is unjust to veterans that this does not recognise his commitment and his public service.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise that case. I encourage her to write, if she has not already done so, to the armed forces and veterans Minister, whom I have certainly found to be attentive in dealing with such cases.

We all have to realise the vast change that will happen in the veterans community over the next 10, 15 and 20 years. There is a whole generation associated with the second world war—we are very low on numbers associated with the first world war—who will be dead in a few years' time. Our veterans community will be younger and more diverse in terms of men and women and its ethnic make-up at time goes by. Any new strategy we implement has to take cognisance of those changes. The expectations of veterans and ex-forces personnel will change as well. They will expect more from the Government and more from local government. They will expect better, joined-up service delivery from local and national Government.

There are different models around the world that we can learn from, and we should not be afraid to ask some pretty big questions. For example, does it need to be the Ministry of Defence that is responsible for veterans' services? In the United States, there is an entirely separate Government Department for veterans' services. New Zealand has a separate Government Department. In South Korea, a veterans council is responsible for the implementation of veterans' services and strategies. We know—let us be charitable—how stretched the Ministry of Defence is at this particular juncture, so perhaps we could be asking these

types of big questions and question whether the models and the set-up we have really will serve people best in the future. We could learn from the Danish model when it comes to supporting serving members of the armed forces who go on to become veterans and ex-forces.

Most of the Members here in the Chamber regularly attend debates on defence. They will know that the Scottish National party has called for the establishment of an armed forces federation. In fact, we introduced a Bill to that effect. I know many Members do not agree with that, but I am not convinced we are serving them well at the moment. Members of the armed forces do not have a statutory body to advocate on their behalf. They really just rely on Members of Parliament. I hate to point it out, but when one looks at the numbers who are here today less than a week on from Remembrance Sunday, we have to think that perhaps Members of Parliament are not the best ones to always rely on—exceptional circumstances do exist, of course. But why can veterans not have a body, similar to the Police Federation, which has a role in statute to argue for better terms and conditions for them and their families while they are in the armed forces, when they leave the armed forces, and, as others have mentioned, for that crucial transition phase.

We need to better codify the role of the veterans champion. Sadly, about 10 minutes after the Minister got to his feet, Glasgow's veterans champion, who was in the Gallery, had to dash off to Euston to get his train back to Glasgow. In Scotland, we have 32 veterans champions, one of whom is the husband of my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron). There are 32 different people doing this across Scotland—I am not sure how many there are in the rest of the UK—and there is not any real code to say what their job is or what their responsibilities are. Someone might be in Glasgow, where we have a really active and excellent veterans champion who operates within the city council—within the local authority—but then they might cross the boundary into another local authority and find that that is not the case.

I get the feeling that part of why we do not codify this is that it will end up costing more money, but that cannot be a reason not to do so. I speak to veterans champions who are full of the best will in the world but who are not entirely sure where their role fits within the council. In Glasgow, for example, our veterans champion is not an elected member of the council, which I think is a good thing. It gives them freer rein, but in my understanding, in most local authorities they tend to be Lord Provosts—the Scottish equivalent of the town mayors that exist in England and other parts of the UK. It is absolutely a worthy role, but exactly what the role of a veterans champion is, and is not, needs to be tightened up.

I come to the issue of suicide among veterans. I agree with the Minister that we cannot allow the myth to be perpetuated of the broken warrior, as it were, but at the same time, we cannot ignore failings in the system. On the issue of suicide, it is my understanding—I think the Minister said this at the Dispatch Box and in comments to the media at the weekend—that there will be moves to start recording suicides among those who have served in the armed forces but who no longer serve.

[Stewart Malcolm McDonald]

Two weeks ago, I sent a letter to the Secretary of State for Justice and the Cabinet Secretary for Justice in the Scottish Government asking how this would work. My understanding of English law, limited though it is, is that this would have to happen through coroners in England—I think that coroners exist in Wales and Northern Ireland as well, but we do not have coroners in Scotland, so presumably it would fall to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service there. Where there are changes to that in England or Scotland, I hope that we can do this in a joined-up way and that we ultimately get to the place we all want to be, where we have proper figures so that we can better understand and tackle these issues.

In summing up—I am conscious that other Members want to get in—I welcome the publication of the strategy and the fact that we are having this debate in Government time. There is a debate next week on the armed forces covenant as well, and that is a good thing. It is good to see that there is now some pretty strong parliamentary impetus behind this, but I say to Members here and Ministers: let us not be beholden to any sacred cows. Let us think big. Let us be bold and let us all work together to make each of our communities the best place possible to be a veteran.

3.33 pm

Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald), and I thank him for his kind and generous words. He can be assured that while I may not be in government, I will continue to believe that defence has nothing to do with party and everything to do with the nation and those who have served us, and that all of us have a responsibility to them. It is a pleasure and a privilege to be their advocate when necessary—be that the families, those serving or those who have left the service—and to support them by lobbying Ministers in whichever Department we are required to.

It is a real pleasure to stand here in a debate in Government time about veterans—those who have served. When I arrived here in 2015, my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) helped me to understand that there had been a loss of impetus from the Government in speaking about military matters in the Chamber. A number of us have taken that as a challenge over the past three years, and it is fantastic that our incredibly passionate Minister, who took on this role last year, has driven forward the determination to have these conversations more widely and to push out there the issue of those who serve and have served.

I want to mention a very special remembrance event last weekend in Berwick—that most northern point of England. Twenty-five of the most northern parishes came together in Berwick parish church to lay wreaths. We held a vigil on Saturday night. The wreaths were placed in the shape of a cross in front of the altar, which was moving in itself, then four of my young cadets from the Army Cadet Force came and stood at each corner of the cross. They stood there from 7 pm until 11 pm, without moving, as the names of all those who had served in world war one and world war two were read

out slowly by an extraordinary group of people, the representatives of each parish, old and young. There were many there who were new to their parishes, and many whose families had been part of that community for 100 years.

It was profoundly moving to see those young men and women, whom I know well because I spend a lot of time with them, standing to attention and respecting not only those who had died but the armed forces. I know that three of them want to enter the armed forces themselves and take on the extraordinary challenge that is faced by all members of the forces. It means a really exciting career and learning exceptional skills, but it also means a willingness to put their lives on the line if necessary to defend us and our nation. That will never cease to amaze me, and to fill me with the utmost respect for every single one of them.

When I set up the all-party parliamentary group on the armed forces covenant when I was first elected, I wanted it to speak up for armed forces families. The covenant put something very good into law, but I began to discover things accidentally, as so often happens when a person becomes an MP—we discover all sorts of subjects with which we have had no particular relationship before. Military families came and talked to me about their struggles and the issues in their lives, from school places to housing to medical assistance. You name it, they were all there: the challenges of moving around, the challenges of not having a base and the feeling that the system could not support them.

Three years on, it is really exciting to see a strategy for veterans that has a wrap-around effect on their families as well. I pay tribute to the Minister, who I know has battled with the system to get it to where it is now, and also to his team. I have worked with many of them over the past year, and I know that they have put in an enormous amount of work to reach the beginnings of a strategy that will be incredibly supportive to all the families.

I want to raise a number of issues about which my knowledge has grown over the last three years, and on which I think we can make progress in the years ahead. One of them is the question of money. Families who are seeking support in relation to a particular issue—as well as veterans, and, in some cases, those who are still serving—say, “It is so complicated. There are so many charities. I don’t know where to go. It is very difficult. How do I start?”

For a long time I worked in the north-east with a group called the Community Foundation. That extraordinary organisation, which has now spread across the country, originated in the United States. Regional charities’ finances are held together in a pot so that the money that they all hold can be used in a better way. Members of a central board can direct those who come seeking support to the right charity, so that an individual who is probably in distress, or is battling other issues, does not have to go hunting for the right support. There are more than 3,000 charities, many of which hold very small amounts of money and have a particular focus. A charity may have been set up by a family who had lost someone who served, for instance.

If we could draw charities together to work in a collaborative, central way so that people seeking support could go to a central point and a board would direct them, that would relieve them of a great deal of stress.

There is so much support out there—it may not be in the part of the country where we live, but that does mean that it does not provide the right specialist care for the person we are seeking to support. I will leave that suggestion with the Minister, but I should be happy to follow it up and see whether we can have a more cohesive conversation with charities. I have spoken to some of them about that already.

The veterans gateway, which was set up last year, is a great start in that it provides people with an initial central point to go to. During its first year it has responded to many questions, from “Where can I get my medals replaced?” to “My husband is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and I do not know where to go.” An extraordinary range of questions have been sent down that telephone line. The team are working to build the network and signpost people in the right direction, but the question I would ask is, are we really tracking whether the right outcomes are achieved for those who call? I am not sure that we are there yet.

Sometimes there may be an easy question for which there is an easy answer—big tick, it is sorted. That is fantastic. But I remain concerned that people are signposted to a charity that ought to be able to help, but no one from the gateway is then checking that they have actually received that help. So they may end up back in the ether, still struggling to find the support that they need. I ask the Minister to set out—or to consider, if this is not being done—how we can have a real tracking system so that the outcome of the support the gateway is supposed to provide is actually achieved. Some of the cases will be difficult, and will not simply entail making a direct phone call to the next person, with the solution then being provided.

That brings us on to a wider question about the MOD’s responsibility to look after veterans. That question has frustrated me, because one reason why the covenant was such a great thing for David Cameron to put into law in 2011 was that that is not only the MOD’s responsibility. Although the MOD does of course have a duty of care to those who have served and have needs afterwards, that should be a cross-Government project. The veterans board was a great start, and I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Sir Michael Fallon) for battling to get it into the manifesto so that it could come to fruition at the end of last year, but I am not sure that every other Department understands the vital contribution that they each make, because veterans and their families are affected by their work just as everybody else is.

If the covenant is to be real, we must realise that we have committed as a nation to giving veterans and their families support without question. That is what the covenant means to me: it means that we value them for the rest of their lives. As the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) said, for many of our veterans now, that is going to be a very long time—they are going to live long lives with challenging issues and disabilities that will appear later down the line, especially mental health problems. We see Northern Ireland veterans now coming out with severe mental health problems, 20 or 30 years after they served.

As a public services community we must make sure we are ready to pick up these issues. I worry that we are always thinking, “They were soldiers once, so it’s the MOD’s responsibility.” That is not good enough; that is not what the covenant should be. I concur with the hon.

Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith) that we should consider taking the covenant to a higher statutory level, rather than simply having it setting out its vision. The MOD’s job is to defend us; that is its purpose—to be prepared for war, to have the deterrents to try to prevent war from happening, but to have soldiers, sailors and airmen ready to take us to war if necessary. That is the MOD’s job, whereas the job of the NHS is to look after us if we are sick, and the council’s job is to provide people who need a house with housing and to look after education services. All those issues affect veterans and their families, because they are participant members of our society for the rest of their lives. So we must continue to question whether we leave the responsibility for the covenant in statutory terms in the hands of the MOD, or whether the Government and Parliament should consider taking it to a higher level.

I receive many letters such as the following one, which is from a serviceman’s wife, because families contact me all the time. I apologise if my voice breaks while reading it, as it is not an easy letter to read. But I will read it anyway, because it illustrates the issues we are struggling with:

“I write to you to tell you of my experience of living with a husband who has PTSD following his tour in Afghanistan in 2010.

This weekend may have potentially seen the end of our marriage and there is a real risk my husband will self-harm to end his life. His behaviour has caused me to ask him to leave. He has gone to his Grandma’s and my understanding is his parents have contacted the correct health authorities to get the help that he needs. They have moved faster than any of our local authorities have here. He has previously presented at his local GP who told him to self-refer to a local mental health charity. I find it shocking that people have to “self-refer” when they have a mental health condition. The temptation is to just go home and do nothing, brush it under the carpet, do it another day, ultimately delaying treatment.

He has received community CBT and EMDR from people who have absolutely no experience in dealing with conflict trauma. The hospital he presented at yesterday said the treatment he has received has been a sticking-plaster no more, no less, and that he is seriously ill.

This has been ongoing for eight years. For eight years I have had to live with his financial mismanagement and deception, which has taken a sinister turn over the weekend. His actions are not compatible with a stable marriage and for the sake of my children and I, I have asked him to leave to seek treatment.

I have never received any support from the military as to how I deal/manage with my husband’s PTSD. My husband likewise hasn’t had any contact from the Army. I just cannot comprehend this lack, and total disregard, for their duty of care.

He was medically discharged for physical injuries he sustained during that tour in 2014. He served in Helmand as a platoon commander leading young men at a young age in an area that, without exception, was the most dangerous place in the world. How can the army not follow up with serving members of the forces to check they are ok when people have died on patrols that they have led? People have lost limbs, had spinal fractures, have been injured in an IED explosion themselves. How can they not check that the families have the support that they need? How can they risk more potential casualties in the form of suicide? I am alone in facing this. The government cannot delegate their duty of care to charities. Relying on people to approach them.

My husband talks a good game. On any vague assessment he would present as healthy. He hid his physical injuries for 2 years as he felt others had it worse. This ended his career. He will likely be wheelchair bound at 60. In terms of his physical injuries, his Regiment have utterly failed in their duty of care. He has never been treated at any of the army rehabilitation centres because a doctor only spotted the physical injuries 2 years post tour when he presented for something else. He didn’t fall into the category of ‘conflict wounded’. He has had to rely on community treatment

[Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan]

and has always had to push for his own treatment, paying privately in each instance. It just baffles me how this can all happen. His Regiment, Army and the government have abandoned him and us. Our local mental health services are woefully inadequate to deal with such complex injuries and I am not a qualified mental health expert! My greatest fear is that this letter will be included one day as an exhibit in a bundle”—[*Interruption.*]

Jim Shannon: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs Trevelyan: Yes—thank you.

Jim Shannon: The hon. Lady is very passionately telling the story of someone she knows very well. That example is replicated across the whole of the United Kingdom, and every one of us has encountered people that that has happened to. I want to support her in making her comments, and to reassure her that everyone in the House understands exactly what she is saying.

Mrs Trevelyan: I thank the hon. Gentleman; he is very kind. This Chamber is the most wonderful thing when it works in a collegiate fashion.

The serviceman's wife finishes by saying:

“My greatest fear is that this letter will be included one day as an exhibit in a bundle collated for the Coroner. I have no voice but I know that this cannot continue.”

I get far too many of those letters, and I imagine other colleagues do as well. We do our best, but the challenge is to provide these people with a voice. The Minister cannot independently battle his way through the system and make every Department suddenly behave as it should for these families. I have been raising this matter for a while, and he will not be surprised to hear it again.

The covenant cannot work solely by virtue of kindness, consideration and everybody out there saying that it is a good thing, perhaps without understanding exactly what that responsibility means or rising to the challenge of prioritising where it is required. At the moment, the covenant is a carrot. It is a positive, uplifting and encouraging message of support from the Government to those who have served, but that is not enough if families are having to experience years of frustration. The military do not ask for help—that is an extraordinary phenomenon. I have an RAF base and a large Army base in my patch, and no one there ever complains about anything. I hear about problems from a vicar or from a schoolteacher, and then I go looking to help to solve them. They never come to ask for help. They will battle on, because they are a can-do community that will try to find its own solutions. They have an extraordinary gift of resilience. As a community, they look after each other because that is what we ask them to do in times of war, but the families cannot always do that.

I believe that we need to create a system that involves some kind of covenant ombudsman. We have a parliamentary ombudsman to go to when nothing else has worked, and we need a covenant ombudsman as well. It should be an organisation that sits outside any Department and that is empowered by Parliament to have a voice and to fight wherever it is required for each family. It cannot be right that we receive letters such as the one I read, that we cannot solve those problems and that such families have had to wait so many years before they feel it is okay to stick their heads above the parapet and cry, “Help!”

I leave that with the Minister. It is not a new request, but it is one we need to drive forward. The carrot mentality is just not enough to ensure that families get the support they need when they need it.

3.50 pm

Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) (Lab): It is a real pleasure to follow the impassioned contribution from the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan), who is a huge advocate for veterans and, indeed, the Royal Marines. Commitment to and passion for those men and women serving in and leaving the world's finest armed forces can surely be found on both sides of the House. As the Member of Parliament for the home of the Royal Navy, that is heartening for me to see.

I will keep my remarks brief this afternoon. Along with many Members of this House, I spent last week at remembrance services, selling poppies in my constituency. Needless to say, we in Portsmouth were again profoundly moved by and deeply proud of the bravery and sacrifice of service personnel past and present. Pride in our armed forces comes naturally to my city. As the home of the Royal Navy, we know personally of the remarkable courage and expertise in service of those generations that have fought for our country. That is why I am so passionate about ensuring that our Government, our public services and the economy work to support them during their service and beyond, during their transition back to civilian life. So I thank the Minister for his statement today; it was hugely helpful to hear.

This is not a party political issue. Personally, I could not care less from which party or place support for our veterans comes, so long as it is comprehensive and generous. This strategy is at least a good start—it certainly makes lighter reading than today's withdrawal agreement. I await the results of the consultation with great interest, and I anticipate serious policy commitments. Specific and effective policy is needed because, as has been mentioned by my colleagues, the challenges facing veterans are serious and deserve a response of equal weight.

The Minister may recall from my correspondence with him my support for the armed forces covenant, and I am proud that Portsmouth City Council has recently received the gold award. Equally, however, he may recall my urging him to give some teeth to the covenant and for it to go further.

The same could be said about this strategy and the Government's support for veterans generally. I wholeheartedly endorse each and every one of the key themes set out by the Minister's Department. Co-ordination of services, data collection and proper recognition for our veterans—these are all things I have been campaigning for and absolutely support. However, to be realised, they require timely action from Government. That is especially true of the shocking lack of worth our veterans feel is placed in them by the wider population. According to a heart-breaking report by SSAFA, 62% feel undervalued by society. I was pleased to see that recognition of veterans was a key strand in the veterans strategy. I also greatly welcome plans to introduce an official veterans ID card, and perhaps the Minister could update the House later on progress on that.

It is clear that action to improve life for veterans does not have to be hugely costly or complex to be effective. I will confine my remarks to an issue that is not only

particularly pertinent, but something whose treatment it would be simple to improve. That issue is mental health, and specifically data collection on suicide rates.

I should say from the start that we should in no way stigmatise our armed forces personnel. The majority of ex-servicemen and women adapt very well to civilian life. The skills required in the forces are unique and an extremely valuable addition to the existing talents that those in our services often hold. As the Minister and other Members of this place can attest, life in the forces can preface great success in civilian and even public life. That does not mean we can afford to lose sight of those in our armed forces who do need support and care.

The UK is almost unique in not requiring coroners to mark an individual as a veteran. As a result, only one of the 98 coroners in England and Wales does so. That is something almost all our allies do, including Canada, America and Australia, because it makes sense. This is important and useful data about and for the veteran community.

How can we possibly go about solving this issue if we do not know the scale of the problem? The Ministry of Defence currently puts the tri-services suicide rate at eight per 100,000, which is notably lower than the 15.5 per 100,000 rate that the Office for National Statistics reports among the general male population. I have no doubt that everyone in this House would welcome that state of affairs but, put simply, significant research from the Royal British Legion and my own conversations with the veteran community suggest that it does not reflect reality. The fact is that we do not know for sure, which is exactly my point.

In answer to my written question of 8 October on the plans that the MOD and the Ministry of Justice have for introducing such a recording duty on coroners, the Minister said he had had no such conversations with colleagues in the Ministry of Justice. Perhaps he could say today whether he might consider introducing a coroner recording duty as part of the veterans strategy. The move would fit well with the Government's aim, as stated in yesterday's document, of enhancing the collection, use and analysis of data across sectors to effectively address the needs of veterans. I believe the measure would have broad support from the public and the military, including from General Sir Dave Richards. I urge the Government to listen and to capitalise on this remarkably simple but invaluable step.

I also pay tribute to the campaigning of the *Portsmouth News* and the *Sunday People*, and specifically to the dedication of Portsmouth veteran Stephen James, who has developed a fantastic peer-to-peer chat app, All Call Signs, to connect former services personnel, allowing them to support each other directly when mental health difficulties arise.

We owe services personnel far better than to turn a blind eye. Inevitably, the data itself would not help us to reduce the number of tragic incidents, but it would be invaluable in bettering our understanding of the issue, which is crucial if we are to tackle it. Again, I encourage the Minister to incorporate this commitment to veterans.

3.57 pm

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Portsmouth South (Stephen Morgan), who is clearly a champion of the personnel who serve or are based in his constituency.

Most veterans and ex-services personnel have a positive experience of military service and many, like one of my sons-in-law, gain skills and experience that benefit them as they migrate to civilian life. They form lifelong bonds with their service colleagues in many cases, and it was poignant at the recent Remembrance Day services in both Ayr and Cumnock to witness for myself the strong bonds among the veterans and ex-services personnel who came together to remember their fallen friends.

Despite the morning weather in Ayr, it was a pleasure to see so many of the young generation turn out on that Sunday—I am sure it was the same in Glasgow—and that has to be applauded and welcomed. I thank Rev. David Gemmell and the poppy knitters of the auld kirk of Ayr for a wonderful display. The auld kirk was bedecked in colourful poppies that enriched the service that day.

For some veterans, however, their military career was not such a positive experience, and whether or not the root causes of the mental health issues experienced by services personnel are a direct result of that service, it is crucial that veterans receive proper support during and after their military service. I am pleased to see that support is foremost in this veterans strategy.

The UK charity Combat Stress operates the wonderful Hollybush House facility in my constituency of Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock, affording support and sanctuary for former members of the British armed forces who are suffering from mental health conditions such as PTSD. Clearly, treatment is free of charge to all veterans, and, most important, it is provided by a dedicated team of professionals based there. For the small minority who do not immediately adapt to civilian life as they migrate from their service days and who lose their way momentarily or, as sometimes sadly happens, for a lifetime, the veterans strategy and veterans gateway services at Hollybush House are to be welcomed. Together with the new veterans units, they will improve the response for those in need.

Additionally, there are charities such as Care after Combat, whose stated aim is to change people's lives for the better. It is working with the NHS, a great player in assisting our veterans, to support veterans who have fallen foul of the justice system in an effort to reduce reoffending. Unforgotten Forces comprises 15 leading organisations, led by Poppy Scotland, which together afford enhanced support to veterans and ex-service personnel aged over 65 and to their families in Scotland. That is to be welcomed and applauded. Clearly, wide and able support is available in the voluntary sector, and the key word is "voluntary"; many of these people give of their time freely to assist our veterans and ex-service personnel.

I am pleased that the Government have, in this strategy, outlined what more can be done centrally to support veterans. Apart from the invaluable armed forces covenant, which has been discussed and to which at least 3,000 organisations have now signed up, veterans will also benefit from the Department for Work and Pensions' Disability Confident scheme, and the Career Transition Partnership has successfully supported some 200,000 veterans into new careers after their service since its inception some 20 years ago.

This Government have done a great deal to support veterans, but we cannot be complacent, as the task is not at all complete. As I have previously mentioned in this House, I very much welcome the extra funds announced

[Bill Grant]

in the Budget to support veterans, which are in addition to the funds the Government previously committed to support the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust. I also welcome the consultation mentioned by the Minister, which is soon to get under way, but we have to pay attention to the outcome of that consultation. There is no point in having a strategy that is simply put on a shelf; we have to act as a Government and as a nation to ensure that what we learn from that consultation is applied effectively.

I welcome the scope of this strategy, which will ensure that our veterans receive the support they need well into the future. Should a veteran stretch their hand out for help or assistance, this nation must grasp that hand firmly and give them that assistance, which they so richly deserve. I wish to personally thank those whose military service has protected me, my family, my constituents and indeed this country over many years.

4.2 pm

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow colleagues in this very moving debate about critical issues facing veterans and, in particular, to follow the hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant). His area shares a great affinity with Glasgow, because it is of course the traditional home of the Royal Highland Fusiliers, the Glasgow and Ayrshire Regiment, which now forms part of the Royal Regiment of Scotland, as its second battalion. I had the great pleasure of visiting 2 Scots at Glencorse barracks in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Danielle Rowley), where I had discussions on a number of issues facing serving personnel and members of the regimental family who are now veterans.

As of July, I count myself as a veteran, having served 12 years as a reservist in the Royal Regiment of Scotland. I am very proud to wear the regimental tie today, just as I did on Sunday, when I went to George Square, as I have done for several years, to join many of my friends at the cenotaph to remember our friends who have suffered life-changing injuries and, in my case, a good friend who was killed in Afghanistan in 2013. That is a moment for us not only to reflect, but to get together to have a good old time—there is a social aspect. For many people, particularly those who have worn the uniform, Remembrance Day is about not just solemn remembrance, but having a bit of a laugh, which is always good. We did get on to talking in great detail about many of our friends who have suffered, and in the past few months alone, the Royal Regiment of Scotland veterans have taken it upon themselves to set up a Facebook group to try to help each other.

It has been eye-opening to see the difficulties that many people are going through but which they often cannot make clear to their comrades. There is a culture, particularly in the Army, of not talking about these things. Instead, people have traditionally been told to man up, get on with it and pull themselves together. In the past, it was an admission of weakness for someone to say that they had difficulties, so it is great that people feel that there is now a safe space in which to make those vulnerabilities clear to their friends and to seek help.

In that spirit, I welcome the thrust of the veterans strategy, particularly the cross-cutting factors that have been identified, which chime with what I would like to see happen. However, I am concerned that the document is too high level and that there is not enough understanding of the intended outcomes. There is a broad intent, which is laudable, but a lot of details about how it is to be delivered are lacking. The term used in the Army is “mission command”: beginning with a general intent, but then building up a fuller picture of what is to be delivered on the ground. It is ironic in an organisation with an effective command-and-control system built into its DNA that when it comes to supporting our veterans, that seems to fall apart and the same rigor is not applied. I would like that to be addressed as part of the further development of the strategy. This is crucial for collaboration between organisations and the co-ordination of veterans services. The urgency burns through and needs to be gripped.

A lot of charities are doing excellent work and many have been mentioned today. A great example in the city of Glasgow and the wider area is the Erskine Hospital, which was founded over 100 years ago by one of the Yarrow family whose son was killed on the battlefields of the first world war. So riven with guilt was he that he formed a charity along with William Macewen, one of the leading surgeons in Glasgow at the time, to create the first proper prosthetic limbs to help those who had suffered life-changing injuries in the first world war. The charity continues to help veterans of all ages to this day.

We have to recognise that the demography of our veterans is changing. The Army has downsized by around 20,000 regular soldiers in the last five years alone. That is a significant outflow of people, many of whom will have served in conflict zones—very intense conflict zones at that—and those people will have very particular and urgent needs that need to be catered for. I do not feel that there is any sort of infrastructure to deal with those specific requirements, however, and that needs to be dealt with.

I have spoken about this next issue several times in the last few months, because many of my friends and people I know personally have been affected. Indeed, we lost four Jocks from the Royal Regiment of Scotland in the space of two months, in July and August this year, which is a terrible suicide rate. Indeed, it is estimated that over 50 veterans have taken their own lives in the last year alone. We have to recognise the true scale of the problem. My hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth South (Stephen Morgan) talked about data collection, and we need to get a grip of that. Other countries have shown the way on how to deliver it, as the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) hinted at. We need more robust infrastructure that assists in identifying veterans so that we can then help them.

Often, when we think of a veteran, we think of someone who has heroically served their country and then left on good terms to go off, be of good character and deliver in civilian life. Technically, anyone who has served one day in uniform is a veteran, and many will be discharged in difficult circumstances, such as for drugs problems or reasons of chaos in their personal lives. They will leave on unhappy and difficult terms, and simply to cast them out and not give them the right support is to fail them.

I think of the four Jocks who have taken their own lives in the last couple of months. In many cases, they had already reached out for support. I spoke to Combat Stress about members of the Royal Regiment of Scotland who had sought help for PTSD. Many had identified themselves. Indeed, one of the men who tragically took their life, Jamie Davies, had been recording video diaries of his experiences. They are haunting to watch now in the knowledge that he ended up taking his own life. His descriptions of the difficulties he encountered are harrowing. To think that we all failed him is something we have to take cognisance of.

The sooner we get the strategy robustly developed and delivered meaningfully, the better. We cannot simply have these high-level aspirations; we need a robust plan that actually tells us in root-and-branch detail what we will do differently. That is what we need to understand.

The charities do a great job, but many people who go to charities, and particularly veterans, get some assistance—they might get cognitive behavioural therapy, for example—but find that it does not meet their needs. It is often a box-ticking exercise—“Right, we’ve consulted this veteran. He’s presented himself and we’ve dealt with it”—that might not resolve the issue, and there is no ongoing support once the course of treatment has finished. They then fall through the net and find no way out other than to take their own lives. That is the tragedy that is happening.

It is not that we do not know that these people are there. We know they are there, but we are just not robust enough in helping them, which is why we need to look into having a structure that takes its inspiration from the command-and-control structure that is embedded in the armed forces so that we can robustly deal with these issues. My view is that a caseworker ought to be appointed to every veteran who leaves the armed forces as a single, consistent point of contact to whom they can turn, regardless of the length of time since they left. That would be an ideal structure, because veterans often fall into the gaps between different charities and organisations. They have to go through the same history and issues, and end up overwhelmed with frustration. They disengage from the process and find themselves lost—and then they are lost to their friends and family as well, when they take their own lives. That is the true carnage that is being caused and its cost.

We do not know the true scale of the situation—the people we identify may be just the tip of the iceberg. Veterans who find themselves in prisons will not identify as veterans. Veterans who find themselves with mental health problems, drug addiction or alcohol addiction will not identify as veterans, because they do not want to embarrass their friends—they do not want to embarrass their cap badge. We have to get a grip of this issue, on a number of fronts.

I welcome the strategy in broad strokes. The cross-cutting factors that have been identified—improvements in data on the veterans community, public perception and understanding, recognition, and, most importantly, collaboration and co-ordination—are laudable, but that does not go nearly far enough. We have a crisis on our hands in this country, and it is an ever-looming one, as more than 100,000 people in our country have served in the theatres of Iraq and Afghanistan in Operations Telic and Herrick. If we do not help them, an absolute epidemic of mental health problems will be visited

upon us. The needs of the world war two generation are different from the needs of the generation—my generation—that has served in conflict zones in the past 15 or 20 years. We have to get an understanding of how to tailor services to their needs. I welcome the Government’s strategy but, echoing the sentiments expressed from the Opposition Front Bench, we need to go much further to get a grip and to deliver for our service personnel—we owe them nothing less.

4.12 pm

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in the debate and particularly to follow the powerful speech made by the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney), given the personal tales we have just heard. He was right to say that it is very welcome that people can now talk about their experiences. An awful definition was used a century ago when there was the idea that people who had seen absolutely appalling horrors of war somehow “lacked moral fibre” because they had finally broken after several years of unimaginable experiences. Nowadays, we recognise that there are some things that would break anyone. At the end of “Blackadder Goes Forth”, there are those poignant last three minutes of humour in the most dark of situations. Captain Blackadder says that he pretended to be mad and then realised

“who would have noticed another madman around here”—

they would have to be mad to be in that trench and in that war. What the hon. Gentleman said was very welcome, and it was also very welcome to see him, as someone who has served our country, wearing his regimental tie proudly.

I welcome the overall tone of the debate, starting with the Minister’s speech. I pay tribute to the speeches made by the hon. Members for Llanelli (Nia Griffith) and for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald), who spoke on behalf of their respective parties. That tone has continued right the way through the debate. It is welcome to have debates on veterans’ issues to ensure that veterans have a voice in Parliament and that their needs are heard here, and that is important because of how things have changed. If we had been having this debate 50 years ago, virtually everyone in this Chamber would have seen action in world war two or world war one. At that time, well over 90% of Members of Parliament were male, and virtually all would have been of an age that meant they had faced conscription in either world war one or world war two, or national service and the Korean war afterwards. The whole of society was full of people—obviously men, at that time—who had seen heavy combat and heavy action.

What really brought the situation home to me was the challenge faced by veterans coming back from Afghanistan. Those individuals came back to a society in which, actually, most people had not had the same experience as them. At a dinner of the armed forces all-party group, I heard a commander say that the casualty rate of his battalion in Afghanistan had been the same as that of one of its predecessor battalions in the Somme offensive. Thanks to modern medicine, however, not so many people died, as many great interventions were made to keep people alive. Fundamentally, however, the wider impact of being killed or seriously injured in Afghanistan was roughly the same as that of the Somme. That really brought it home to me, but a person who

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comes back from Afghanistan is not returning to a community where every man in the street has had the experience of being either at that battle or another one, which might make them feel very isolated and alone.

That is why, in such debates, I like to pay tribute to the Royal British Legion. I certainly welcomed the comments from the shadow Secretary of State for Defence about the individual member of her party, and it is worth saying that there are many members of the trade union and Labour movements who have died for this country. They have worn our uniform and served to ensure that we can live in the democracy that we have today. I do not think that we should take the views of one—to put it bluntly—idiot and try to paint that as the views of an entire movement that has sacrificed so much to protect our democracy. Clement Attlee, of course, stood shoulder to shoulder with Winston Churchill when this country went through its darkest hours back in the 1940s, and he was clear that appeasement and surrender were not an option in the fight against the evil that was National Socialism.

I particularly want to pay tribute to my local RBL, which not just works with veterans, but provides that link between the military, veterans and the wider community—the community of people who might never have served, but want to support their veterans. I shall start by looking at the work of Paignton Royal British Legion, which is one of two branches in my area. It is led very well by its chairman, John Kavanagh, who is a veteran himself. He takes great pride in his military service and in leading the team. What the branch did for the centenary came from a fitting idea from its secretary, Donna Fortune, about bringing to life the war memorial, which lists the names of 224 sons of the town who volunteered in world war one and never came back. The idea was to have a candle symbolising the light that went out in the first world war, and each candle bore the name of someone on the memorial.

On Remembrance Sunday, as we marked the 100th anniversary of the armistice, young people from the town took a candle from the local parish church, which many of those who fought in the war would have known as it is still pretty much as it was at that time, and took it to the memorial to lay it there. What was particularly fitting was that these young men and girls were about 15, 16 and 17—the age of those who went off to fight. That served as a reminder to many people because sometimes when we go to remembrance parades, we look at older veterans. We therefore might make the mistake of thinking that people who fought in these wars were older, yet the reality is that those who lost their lives and made the ultimate sacrifice were young men from the town who volunteered, went off to do their bit and then never came home. For me, it was very moving to see the memorial in the evening with the candles lit as a reminder of those sons of Paignton who gave their all so that we can have the free Parliament that we have today. I also wish to pay tribute to Don McKechnie, the poppy appeal organiser for the Paignton branch, who has worked so diligently on this year's successful appeal.

The other RBL branch in my constituency is in Torquay. Its secretary, Arthur Christian, who is a veteran, combines running a local estate agency with supporting

the branch. His team worked very hard to produce a superb tribute to the centenary on Torquay seafront on Sunday, which was one of the largest events that we have had in a long time. Back in July, a new standard was dedicated at the local church, and that was specifically done so that it could be paraded at Great Pilgrimage 90, which marked the 90th anniversary of veterans of world war one plus families who had lost loved ones in those famous battles going out to see the cemetery. For those colleagues who have not done this, I can say that it is quite thought provoking to stand at Tyne Cot and look back down at what is called Passchendaele ridge.

It is not much of a ridge, more of a low incline in the middle of flat land. It is where the defenders were ready and waiting and from where they could see into the town of Ypres and see our forces advancing, as those men attempted to assault positions on that ridge. For many, it was where they lost their lives. Sadly, many were not found or, if they were, could no longer be identified by the end of the war.

Veterans are an amazing part of our community today, and the hon. Member for Glasgow South and the Minister were absolutely right. It is easy in these sorts of debates to talk, rightly, about certain issues that affect veterans, but we should also remember that they are an amazing part of our local communities. Eighty per cent of working-age veterans are in employment and three quarters own their own home, either outright or with a loan. Many are doing brilliant jobs, using the skills they learned in the military in their careers. Without them, our society would be much poorer, not just because of the technical skills they learned in the Army, Navy or Air Force, but because of the ethos of service and putting nation before self that they bring from the military into whatever their career is.

Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois), I have met with Care after Combat and heard about its work with those for whom, sadly, civvy street is not working and who have ended up in jail. It is concerning that an estimated 3,500 former servicemen are currently in jail. At the moment, Care after Combat can reach one in 10 of them, and its work has an impact. First-year reoffending rates among those it has engaged with are much lower, and when they are no longer incarcerated, that is a good outcome for them and the taxpayer.

I was pleased to see the Secretary of State also attend that event and see that commitment and support. I hope that we can hear more from the Minister in his winding-up speech about what support will be available and what is happening across Government to ensure linked-up support. It is not about education; it is about engaging with veterans when they are in prison to ensure that they can come out to a home, to support and, particularly if they have engaged in such a scheme, potentially to find employment.

Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford, I also want to touch on veterans and lawfare. I used to be a criminal defence lawyer. Our armed forces are there to uphold the rule of law, and not one member of our armed forces community would wish to see a situation in which the armed forces were above the law. However, it is clear that the balance of investigatory effort and attention paid to matters of the past, particularly in Northern Ireland, has been completely disproportionate. Veterans who were investigated by the

relevant authorities at the time now face having to relive potentially difficult experiences decades later. These are incidents where little if any new evidence is likely to be produced, where many of the witnesses will have passed away or where, bluntly, what witnesses may be available might not be the most impartial individuals and where what they wish to say might have little probity or value.

I know that the Minister is committed to finding a solution to this. I know, too, that that is reflected by the Secretary of State, and it is welcome to hear about Attorney General's work, but I know from my criminal justice background that we have always had the principle of double jeopardy in our system. It is a good principle, and although these cases might not have been taken to court for a formal verdict that would trigger that legal principle, perhaps it could be extended into this area, so that, unless something staggeringly new comes out, where things were clearly investigated and considered at the time, they should not be matters that we look to reopen.

For veterans, like all others, housing is an issue. As we look to tackle our housing problems more generally, this is an area that could benefit veterans and certainly make a difference for them. It is right that we can be very proud of our veterans community—certainly in Torbay we are very proud of them. There is support for them and work is put together, but it can always be better and taken further.

I appreciate debates and I always welcome the opportunity to take part in them. I am conscious of the time and of the fact that we have a rare opportunity to hear from my good friend the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who I know is a passionate advocate of our armed forces and our veterans, so I will close my remarks by repeating that I welcome this debate and the tone of it. I hope that veterans listening to it feel that their contribution to this country—putting their lives on the line to serve this country and defend its values—is appreciated, and that we will provide the services they need.

4.25 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster). I think I have intervened quite a few times now. I am usually the last speaker, but I am pleased to contribute to the debate and thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me.

I have a registered interest as former serving soldier in the Ulster Defence Regiment for three years, and in the Territorial Army, Royal Artillery reserves, for 11 and a half years. The veterans strategy means a great deal to me, not only because of my personal interest as a former part-time soldier, but because the constituency I represent, Strangford, has a good history of interest and service in all the services, whether the Army, the RAF or the Royal Navy.

Like the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois), I attended four remembrance services last Sunday. The first was at 8 o'clock in the morning at Cloughey, the second at 11 o'clock at the cenotaph in Newtownards, our major town, the third at 2.30 pm in Ballyhalbert, and then there was a church service at 7 o'clock in the evening. At every service, I was struck by the turnout of youth organisations, including church groups, the scouts, the Boys' Brigade and the Girls'

Brigade, and the cadets. While we noticed those who were missing from the year before, we were greatly encouraged by the number of youth organisations that were on parade. The next generation is coming through, which is good to see.

I thank the Minister for referring in his introduction to the new consultation document. He can expect to receive some applications from my part of the world. It is good news that money has been set aside regionally, so we can all benefit. I know that is what he always wants, and it is what we always want as well.

Looking about at the remembrance services, we noticed the older veterans, of course, but also the number of people in the crowds who were there to watch and support, wearing their medals with pride. It was a reminder that veterans walk among us every day and are not simply older pensioners. When I saw those men and women standing in solemn remembrance, straight backed, medals on their chests shone to within an inch of their life, I felt the deep frustration and anger to which other Members have referred.

The right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford is no longer here, but he mentioned certain things that I hope to speak about as well, because it is important to put them on the record. I thought of the depth of frustration and anger that would cause a veteran to ask his constituency MP, the hon. Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield), to return his medals to the Prime Minister a number of weeks ago. I do not know more than what I read in the press, but the reason for that was the witch hunt of ex-service personnel in Northern Ireland due to the Irish Republican agenda to rewrite history. Men and women in their 80s are waiting for a letter questioning them about events that took place some 45 years ago. I thought of that as we thought of our veterans on Remembrance Sunday last week.

It is right and proper to acknowledge the 100-year anniversary of the armistice, but I believe it is also right and proper to acknowledge that we owe a duty of care to the veterans of service in Northern Ireland. We are not fulfilling that duty satisfactorily, with respect and as well as we can. It is estimated that some 300,000 military personnel were deployed in Northern Ireland in the course of Operation Banner, which I served in myself. It was the longest running military operation in the history of the British Army and incorporated service in many aspects throughout the troubles.

Many of those men and women who participated carry the scars of that today. Those soldiers who bravely put on the uniform to serve Queen and country are now sitting in their retirement home or their own home frantically trying to recall what they had worked for years to forget, having knowingly put their lives on the line in the battle against the lowest of the low terrorists—terrorists who believed they were justified in firing into a gospel mission hall in Darkley; terrorists who believed they had the right to blow up a war memorial in Enniskillen with women and children surrounding it; and terrorists who had no qualms whatsoever about sending false information to ensure the biggest fatality of innocent people doing their shopping in Omagh.

For many of those veterans, the pain and trauma of the past is very real. They have memories of holding their dying friends in their arms, of sifting through rubble and human body parts, of the screams of anguish, and of the fear of that car driving slowly up to their

[Jim Shannon]

checkpoint. While sitting here, I thought of one story in particular. One of the first UDR men to be killed was a fellow called Winston Donnell in Strabane. A car reversed up towards him and IRA gunmen shot him. He was one of the first to die.

These veterans have memories of the fear of speaking to anyone when off duty and wanting to grab a beer, for fear of a honeytrap, or a beating when their British accent was heard. I often think of the three Scottish soldiers who were murdered in Belfast; they are very much on my mind. All those things are re-traumatising veterans, as we allow them to be re-terrorised in order to provide a sop to the republicans, who have no shame about anything they did and inexplicably wish to rewrite history to seem justified.

There was and is no justification for the murder of my cousin Kenneth Smyth on 10 December 1971 outside Clady in County Tyrone. There was and is no justification for the murder of Lexie Cummings, also a former UDR member, in Strabane on his lunchbreak. And there certainly was no justification for the murder of the four young UDR men at Ballydugan outside Downpatrick, three of whom I knew personally. There can never be any justification for that. This debate on the veterans strategy must incorporate a promise to stop allowing republican murderers to justify their actions.

No one was held accountable for any of those murders. No one was ever held accountable for the murder of Kenneth Smyth. Nobody was ever held accountable for the murder of Lexie Cummings. The person who did it works across the border in Sligo and is a prominent member of Sinn Féin. The person who carried out the murder of the four UDR men at Ballydugan got his just deserts in Downpatrick some time later, but the fact of the matter is that seven other people were arrested, and whatever their role may have been, they were not held accountable either. We need to stop allowing republican murderers to justify their actions at the expense of the mental and physical health of men and women who did nothing wrong, other than to dare to be British and to serve their Queen and country.

Any veterans strategy must incorporate support for those questioned and put an end to the questioning by police. The fact of the matter is that veterans who served in Northern Ireland and who live in Northern Ireland get a raw deal. They still have heightened security concerns due to their service and yet have no benefit from serving.

We do not have a right and proper implementation of the military covenant due to the section 75 element of the Belfast agreement, which has given 20 years of excuses for republicans to continue their hatred and persecution of anything that is slightly related to being British. I am proud to be British and proud to be part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. I often refer to myself as a proud Ulster man who lives in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Those 20 years of excuses for republicans to continue their hatred show the power of section 75. The Minister referred to it earlier, and I hope we can move that along. I know that discussions are ongoing, and I hope we can get some satisfaction. The most ironic part is that it was those veterans, whom they hate so much, who gave them the right to have section 75 to start with.

I hope that Members will forgive me if I repeat the poem read by the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford. I heard it for the first time last week, on Remembrance Sunday, when one of the young people was doing readings at the Cenotaph. The poem reads:

“It is the Soldier, not the minister
Who has given us freedom of religion.
It is the Soldier, not the reporter,
Who has given us freedom of the press.
It is the Soldier, not the poet
Who has given us freedom of speech.
It is the Soldier, not the campus organizer
Who has given us freedom to protest.
It is the Soldier, not the lawyer
Who has given us the right to a fair trial.
It is the Soldier, not the politician
Who has given us the right to vote.
It is the Soldier who salutes the flag,
Who serves beneath the flag,
And whose coffin is draped by the flag,
Who allows the protester to burn the flag.”

These soldiers did not do a shabby job. They did the best they could in situations that we cannot even begin to imagine. We need to stop being shabby to them.

If we medically retire a 30-year-old soldier who joined up at 18—the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan) gave us an example from her constituency that I must say very much resonated with me—we need, without going into too much detail, to ensure he has a place to live, training for a job that is suitable to the disabilities caused by his service and, vitally, mental health support to help him to deal with the trauma and scars that service has left.

Dr Deirdre MacManus, a lead consultant psychiatrist at Camden and Islington NHS Foundation Trust, which runs the transition, intervention and liaison service in London, has said:

“We have seen a greater than 100 per cent increase in referrals over the last six months... We still get soldiers who served in Northern Ireland coming.”

Almost 50,000 veterans have mental health issues, which are often sparked by combat stress. Another 6,000 are homeless and 10,000 are in prison or on probation, as others have mentioned. We need to address those issues as well. I ask myself the question, but I also ask the Minister: are we doing enough? We do look to the Minister for such support, and I have no doubt whatsoever that it will be forthcoming.

How can we do this better? I want to be able to look the veterans in the eye when I meet them, as I do in my constituency. As I always do, I will meet them on Remembrance Sunday next year. When I tell them, “We are remembering you”, I want to be able say that we have done something in this House to make the situation better.

I want to refer quickly to the charities. SSAFA does tremendous work. I have held a coffee morning for it every year since I became the Member of Parliament, which has raised almost £30,000 for it over those years. Help the Heroes and the Royal British Legion, of which I am a member, also do tremendous work. The hon. Member for Torbay mentioned the Royal British Legion and the great work it does. I suppose it is the principal port of call for most people.

May I also give a plug to Beyond the Battlefield? The Minister will forgive me for saying this, but he knows I will refer to it. It does tremendous work in getting to the people who are under the radar, such as those who do not register with the associations. The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed mentioned how associations do not always pick them up, but it is funny how Beyond the Battlefield seems to do so. Whether for benefits, housing, health issues or the appeals, it is there and it does tremendous work. So many people across Northern Ireland are indebted to it for the hard work it does. All these charities do phenomenal work, but that should be additional work, not the only support. That is the point we are trying to get to, if we can.

I will conclude, because I am conscious that the shadow Minister and the Minister want to speak. I believe it is time that we enabled the talking in here to be turned into action out there. I believe—I will reiterate this again, as others have—that the urgent thing is to stop the witch hunt against soldiers and start helping all the veterans who gave their all for us.

4.37 pm

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): It is a pleasure to respond to this constructive and positive debate on behalf of the Opposition.

Those who work in our armed forces deserve our thanks and appreciation, and they also deserve support should they require it when they leave service. As we know, the transition can be difficult for some. The veterans strategy is an opportunity to set out what additional support may be required and how the Government—in partnership with devolved and local government, and the voluntary, charitable and private sectors—can come together to offer a co-ordinated and holistic range of support services. Labour's recently published social contract for veterans guarantees support in areas such as housing, mental health and retraining, and I would like to see the veterans strategy developed to offer a similar guarantee.

During this afternoon's debate, we heard from the Minister about the importance of the covenant, in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth), and he spoke about the patchy delivery of the covenant across the country. In areas where we have committed armed forces champions, they are driving the covenant forward. Sadly, however, that is not the case everywhere.

We heard from the shadow Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith), about the genuine need for a cross-Government approach to highlighting support for veterans. She talked about the Government's poor record in some areas with regard to public service cuts, and about the austerity those cuts have brought to a lot of the services on which veterans and others rely.

We heard from the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois), who raised the case of war widows. He also talked about the range of remembrance events and the display of knitted poppies that he visited last week. That reminded me of my visits to St David's church in Merthyr Tydfil, which had a very moving display, "For the Fallen", in the week leading up to Remembrance Sunday, and to St Tyfaelog's church in Pontlottyn, which also had a very moving display that included a wall of poppies outside the church.

The hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) highlighted the change in demographics over the next 10 years, and raised the issue that will face us of younger veterans who have different needs from those we are used to. The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan) spoke about the veterans gateway, the need to ensure that queries are properly dealt with, and the need for clarity on a tracking system. A moving account from a veteran's wife highlighted the lack of support for veterans who suffer from poor mental health. We all agree that more needs to be done on that issue, and that is something that Members throughout the House will support.

My hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth South (Stephen Morgan)—home of the Royal Navy—said that the comprehensive strategy is a good start and easy to read, but that it needs to have teeth, as does the armed forces covenant. We also need more data on suicides to enable us better to prevent them in future, and to recognise the scale of the issue. The hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant) spoke about mental health and the need for support. He mentioned the Disability Confident scheme, which I was pleased to launch in my constituency last month.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) welcomed the cross-cutting elements of the strategy, but said that more detail is needed on crucial issues of collaboration. He also mentioned the change in demographics, and gave a moving personal account that recognised the scale of the mental health issues facing our veterans and the need to do more to prevent suicides. The hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for Torbay (Kevin Foster) praised the excellent work that the Royal British Legion does across the country, which we would all echo. The hon. Member for Strangford also mentioned the unique situation in Northern Ireland, where there are a lot of veterans who have put their lives on the line, as well as the work of charities and other support services.

Let me reiterate that Labour supports any strategy that seeks to provide additional support to our armed forces. The strategy includes much that we welcome, including on the need for greater collaboration and co-ordination among agencies, the need to improve the public perception of our veterans, and the need to promote greater recognition of the contribution made by our armed forces veterans, so that they in turn feel better valued by the country. However, although there is much we welcome, it is essential that the strategy, and any support it outlines, is funded properly. We have heard a number of times during the debate, not least from my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State, that the services used by many veterans are provided by local authorities and other public bodies—organisations that have had their budgets cut significantly under the austerity agenda pursued by the Government since 2010.

I know that many colleagues in local government would dearly love to provide enhanced services and additional support to our armed forces veterans—indeed, many authorities, public bodies and, increasingly, private companies already try to support veterans and the wider armed forces family through the covenant. However, those organisations, particularly those in the public and charitable sectors, are hamstrung by the lack of financial support from the Government, and although we all support the need for more to be done, the Government must ensure that their strategy is properly funded.

[Gerald Jones]

Like the armed forces covenant, the strategy provides a vehicle to co-ordinate support for our veterans, and we welcome it. However, perhaps the Minister will answer a few key points. Has he, or any of his colleagues in the Department, had contact with the Treasury about the need to properly resource local government and the devolved Administrations, so that we can provide our veterans with the very best support? Will he join us in calling for an end to the deep cuts that we have seen over the past eight years?

As we have heard, the armed forces covenant provides important guarantees to our veterans, but there are long-standing concerns about patchy provision. What is the Department doing to ensure that the covenant's promises become a reality for our veterans community and that the strategy does not simply represent more warm words?

Finally, we have heard from colleagues this afternoon, including the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford and the hon. Members for Torbay and for Strangford, about the worrying issue of false legal claims being brought against members of our veterans community. It is now more than 15 months since the Conservatives pledged to get to grips with this issue in their 2017 election manifesto. Will the Minister tell us when we can expect to see some firm proposals?

4.45 pm

Mr Ellwood: With the leave of the House, I have the pleasure of concluding this cross-party debate on supporting our armed forces, which has been frank and fair. It is pleasing to see the energy of Members on both sides of the House who want to continue our commitment to supporting our armed forces—those in uniform, their families and those who transit into civilian life and are again able to offer something back to society. I am grateful to all hon. Members for their contributions today.

I would first like to pick up on some of the points raised by the Opposition spokesperson, the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Gerald Jones). We are absolutely working to try to identify more funds. He will be aware of the pressures, but there are pockets of funding to be found. It is important that we have greater collaboration and co-ordination on the support that is required for veterans across all levels. We have a further opportunity to debate that next Thursday when we scrutinise the covenant, and I very much look forward to that.

I would like to touch on other contributions. The shadow Defence Secretary spoke about implementation and outcomes. I absolutely agree that it is important to look at them when considering the strategy, and I hope that will be a part of the consultation process. She also touched on an interesting aspect of this issue, which is apprenticeships. We have, I think, more apprenticeships than many other Government Department. We are very proud of that, and apprenticeships are a key contributor to what our armed forces can do.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) passed on a number of messages from Members who understandably could not be here today, including the Chair of the Defence Committee. It is also right that the whole House pays tribute to the

work of my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison), who did an incredible job as the Prime Minister's envoy promoting and organising the world war one commemorations.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford and others also touched on lawfare issues with regard to what is happening to our veterans in Northern Ireland. He hinted at my personal view, which is on the record. This is a matter for the Armed Forces Minister and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland—I have spoken to her about it recently, and we do need to advance the issue. I am aware that it has taken some time, but I know that she is aware of how serious it is and the awkwardness of those who have served and retired completely having to think back to what they did 40 to 50 years ago. We face a very strange situation.

The hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) spoke about Danish models and US models. I touched earlier on the fact that we are sharing best practice on supporting veterans with other nations. He talked about the role of the veterans champions in Scotland, and I am pleased to see that they are in place. I hope that the consultation will address the issue of co-ordination.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan) for all the support she has given me personally during her time at the Ministry of Defence. It is clear that she is passionate about defence. I know she will continue, wherever she sits in the Chamber, to be an advocate for our armed forces. [Interruption.] I meant on the Front Bench or the Back Benches, rather than anywhere else across the Chamber. The work she did to support me, with her background and her understanding of the detail, was absolutely phenomenal. She raised a number of points about accountability. Perhaps we can have a discussion—we have raised this privately as well—about how we can advance some of the ideas that exist, which are well worth it.

The hon. Member for Portsmouth South (Stephen Morgan) was very proud, quite rightly, to speak about the home of the Royal Navy. He made light of the fact that the veterans strategy makes for lighter reading—I hope—than the Brexit document. It is certainly shorter, and possibly might last longer as well—who knows? [Interruption.] The Whips Office did not write that one down.

The hon. Gentleman touched on the ID card, which is very important. Recognition of who our veterans are is critical. Veterans are allowed to keep their ID card—the MOD 90, as it is called—when they depart. We cut the corner off, and that gives them the identification. Veterans are now allowed to apply, and we are just getting the process in place. Drivers' licences will also have a label on them to say whether someone is a veteran. The whole purpose is to allow businesses and organisations to celebrate the fact that they can offer discounts and support to those who are genuinely veterans. Those schemes exist already; we have the Defence Discount Service. I very much encourage all hon. Members to go on to the website and see a virtual map of the fantastic support and discounts that are available for our armed forces and veterans in their towns and constituencies. That is well worth understanding.

The hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant) spoke about Care after Combat and the Career Transition Partnership, which I did not get to

touch on. The partnership is absolutely critical. Its work is advancing, and it is doing an incredible job of making sure that we look after individuals and tailor programmes that take people through the necessary steps of crafting their CV and seeing where their strengths are. I underline the incredible and often unique skillsets that people pick up in the armed forces, but it is also fair to say that many businesses are not so familiar with how those skillsets can be used in new contexts. The Career Transition Partnership programme deals with exactly that.

The hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) said that collaboration between veterans services needs greater co-ordination. I hope that we can continue to provide that, and it is part of what the veterans strategy is intended to achieve through consultation. That must be a critical objective.

My hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) gave a passionate speech about the importance of supporting our veterans. He also rightly articulated how our veterans become part of every aspect and every walk of society. In some cases people would not necessarily know that, because a veteran may have retired some time ago, but veterans do incredible jobs. It might simply be about going up to a veteran and saying, "Thank you for your service." That gives me licence to promote the veterans breakfast clubs, which are a brilliant initiative. One a week is now opening up. They are simple operations. A café might just put a sign up, saying, "Veterans meet here at 8 o'clock on a Wednesday morning", and then like-minded people turn up, with different experiences, but feeling valued—that is what it is all about—and being thanked for their service.

Finally, there was the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). As I said, I want to do some more work with Northern Ireland specifically. He mentioned Operation Banner, and he knows that I served there. He raised many of the issues that we continue to need to work on. I am pleased to be able to go back there and see how, in the very specific circumstances of Northern Ireland, we can advance the covenant and our responsibility and duties to our brave veterans and service personnel there.

I end simply by saying that all this is about our armed forces. It is about our ability to remain in a position to say that we have the most professional armed forces in the world. We can only recruit the next generation of potential service personnel if they know that they will be looked after once they depart the armed forces. It is so important that we continue to have a strong military, given the dangers that we face. It is what we do and what other nations expect us to do—to have a credible, formidable and capable hard power. Ever fewer nations are stepping forward with the ability and desire to help to shape the world about us.

Ultimately, it is also in our economic interest to maintain a strong defence. Indeed, the first line of the strategic defence and security review states that our economic security is aligned with our defence and security. If we want a good, strong economy and prosperity, it is

important for us to be able to defend our shipping lanes and support prosperity in other parts of the world, where it might be threatened.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Will the Minister give way on that point?

Mr Ellwood: Very quickly.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: It is a very quick question. I am guessing that work on the next SDSR will probably start next year. When will we finally see the modernising defence programme?

Mr Ellwood: What is pertinent is that we are now moving towards the spending review, which will provide for the five-year cycle and show where our armed forces funding will go. However, that veers away from matters concerning veterans.

Let me reiterate my thanks for the contributions that have been made today, and for the cross-party support for our armed forces. I end by saying thank you to all who have served in our gallant and brave armed forces.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): What an excellent, good-tempered and positive debate—I do not mean to sound surprised!

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the Veterans Strategy.

PETITION

Home Education: draft guidance and the consultation

4.56 pm

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): The petition reads as follows:

The petition of residents of South Walsall,

Declare that the "Home Education - Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance" has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated: further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002289]

Community Broadband Schemes

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Craig Whittaker.)

4.58 pm

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): This is the first time that I have had the opportunity to lead an Adjournment debate. I am delighted to do so, today of all days, and to raise an issue that is of prime importance to my constituents. For a rural constituency such as Stirling, the issue of broadband continues to be high on the list of priorities. I promised in my maiden speech that I would continue to raise the issue of connectivity in Stirling, and I am grateful for the opportunity to do so today. I want to see all Stirling's communities digitally enabled, connected by fibre or wireless, and I look forward to the day when I can get a mobile phone signal and a 4G service throughout my constituency. We are seeing some progress, but there is still some distance to go.

I want to talk about several broadband issues, including the difficulties that communities face when they set about improving their local broadband service. The first point that I will make—and it is an obvious point—is about what we mean when we use the word “fibre”, because it is important to understand what is meant by it. Fibre-optic cable provides high-speed data connectivity. We should be clear about the difference between “fibre” and full fibre. “Fibre” is not full fibre; full fibre to the premises is capable of gigabit speeds, and is a solution fit for the future.

Most users currently have a much slower, less reliable and limited hybrid service that depends on pre-internet copper infrastructure that was designed to carry phone calls and not data. It is just not honest advertising to describe a hybrid broadband connection as “superfast fibre broadband”. The Advertising Standards Authority should take a closer look at, and a more stringent approach to, the truthfulness of these claims, because they are plainly misleading.

5 pm

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 9(3)).

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Craig Whittaker.)

Stephen Kerr: I hope that the Government will take the opportunity today to send a signal to the industry to get its house in order. Stirling's broadband infrastructure is sub-optimal. It is inadequate and is not future-proof. It needs investment, and it needs intervention. While there is much in the way that BT has invested that is commendable, I cannot help but remain concerned that its investment plans remain based on commercial viability, rather than the requirements of delivering a truly national infrastructure network.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for bringing this issue to the House. Broadband is important to every one of us. If we represent a rural constituency, or a constituency with a mixture of urban and rural areas, the issue is very real. Does he agree that the 100,000 people in Northern Ireland who do not have access to superfast broadband have a right to the same service as people who live perhaps 10 miles away in the towns? More must be done to remove what he has

referred to as the postcode lottery and to enable small businesses to operate to an acceptable standard in the rural communities where they are based.

Stephen Kerr: I completely agree. There is a need for investment to create a truly national all-inclusive infrastructure network.

BT's lack of investment in solutions for exchange-only connections is an example of what I am talking about. This will continue until we see a real divergence between BT Openreach and BT itself. Openreach should be charged with the delivery of this national infrastructure system to allow Britain to become a truly digital nation and an economy fit for the future.

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): I am following my hon. Friend's speech with great interest. He represents Stirling and we all think of Stirling as being the city of Stirling but it is a large rural constituency much like my constituency of Banff and Buchan, and we face similar issues, as we have discussed. We are often told that what we have to overcome are the technical, geographical and topographical issues, but these same premises have power cables and water lines going through the same topographical areas. It is actually a matter of cost.

Stephen Kerr: My hon. Friend makes a good point and I will come on to address some of the issues he has kindly raised.

It amazes me, when I listen to the stories of community broadband groups in my constituency, that community broadband schemes ever happen at all. It was a pleasure to be present at the official launch of the Balquhiddy community broadband in March this year. Balquhiddy is the resting place of Rob Roy MacGregor, perhaps the glen's most famous son; he was an outlaw, thief and folk hero. It is a scattered rural community in one of the most beautiful parts of Scotland, which can also now boast one of the fastest broadband connections in the UK.

That is down to David Johnston and Richard Harris, two of my constituents, who belong to Balquhiddy and who are real heroes in my eyes. They have shown true determination and grit to get this project through. I have met Richard and David many times and their perseverance and tenacity, and indeed that of the whole community, in the face of immovable slow government and unhelpful bureaucracy is inspiring. It is an example of the power of the people. David Johnston met my right hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock) when he was Minister of State at the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport in Stirling to discuss the project. I invite the Minister to come to Balquhiddy to hear Richard and David's story for herself, because although the project came to fruition this year it started way back in 2007. Their experience was extraordinary; it was of official meeting after official meeting and of a series of ongoing disappointments and setbacks. When they started out, BT and the Scottish Government both withheld critical information from them about where upgrades would be happening and which communities would benefit from public funding. That meant that community schemes the length and breadth of Scotland were held up by indecision and dither.

European state aid rules cover broadband investment. That means that, when an area benefits from state-funded infrastructure, it cannot benefit from a second investment. These European rules narrow the field of Government aid, and that has meant that community schemes have been on hold for years while BT and the Scottish Government try to work out behind the scenes what their priorities and plans are. To some extent, we are still waiting, thanks to the state of dither they are in.

It is worth noting that these rules are widely and regularly ignored by other EU countries. The interpretation around intervention in digital infrastructure is a particularly egregious example of where the rules are not only infuriating but actively detrimental to our economy. Imagine for a moment if the EU told us we could not build a road, install a water pipe or upgrade a railway. It is a basic job of Government to ensure that critical national infrastructure is provided, including broadband infrastructure in rural communities. However, because public money is being used, they must conform to an endless litany of rules and regulation.

A similarly convoluted story is told in the Trossachs area, in a beautiful rural community in Stirling around the village of Brig o' Turk and the visually impressive Ben Venue. This community pursued a wireless technology solution. It explored interesting and innovative technologies, only to be let down by Stirling Council, which finally scrapped its community broadband group in favour of taking direct political control. That was a regrettable decision and many community groups have expressed their frustration to me about that decision.

Many other issues impact negatively on community broadband schemes. They include the difficulties communities have establishing wayleaves with public sector organisations, especially the Forestry Commission, which see such things as an opportunity for revenue and profiteering, and the withdrawal of the UK broadband voucher scheme, which happened with no notice. That was another regrettable decision that left some communities without a viable scheme to draw resources from and no clarity at the time on what would replace it. I know that a replacement scheme has since come in, but the capriciousness of Government remains a real issue for community schemes.

The plethora of Government schemes thrown at communities is also a real problem. Community Broadband Scotland failed miserably in its objective to fund and develop community schemes. Its dithering and ineptitude have caused many community groups to turn away from this path. Then there is the involvement of Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband, which has done some good work but lacks transparency about its priorities and plans. That leaves communities without a clear idea of how they can get involved in bringing broadband to their community. Broadband Delivery UK has been slow to act in Scotland and, as I have said, has left communities high and dry by abandoning schemes and being unclear about its approach to local full-fibre networks in rural Scotland.

I have previously said in this House that I am concerned about the use of the national productivity investment fund for broadband investments, as recently outlined in the Budget speech. That is of absolutely no help to my constituents, or to Scottish constituencies. It is money that will be Barnettised and passed to the Scottish

Government and, on past performance, the Scottish Government will not invest the money but continue their dithering.

Of course, this is not the only budgetary issue that affects my constituents. In England, the UK Government have created legislative measures to provide 100% business rates relief on new fibre infrastructure. In Scotland, we still await any like-for-like measure from the Scottish Government. Balquhider is saddled with this cost, as are community schemes the length and breadth of Scotland. Again, while the UK Government act, the Scottish Government dither. In Scotland, the Scottish Government posture, claiming credit for every good thing, while blaming the UK Government for everything else. How, I ask the Minister, has this been allowed to happen?

Can the Minister assure me that her Department is fully cognisant of its responsibilities for broadband provision in Scotland? My hope is that she is open to my gentle but forthright encouragement that the Department should be seen to be far more active in Scotland than it has been. Scottish taxpayers pay toward expenses in reserved areas such as this, just as English taxpayers do, and it is not right that the UK Government should be handing over this reserved area to the ineptitude of the Scottish Government and stepping away.

We have seen some improvement over the past year, and I pay tribute to Ministers in the Department for their approach, but I hope the Minister will take the opportunity of this debate to commit to further action. The SNP has done with broadband what it has done with every issue: it has turned it into a grievance-inspired wedge so that it can talk about independence. That is as predictable as it is tedious, as the SNP does the same with health, education, transport, finance and agriculture—the list goes on.

Now we come to the real problem with broadband in Scotland. The Scottish Government have led communities down a garden path with promises of a shining city—a digital Jerusalem, if you will—and with their much-vaunted R100 project. The object of this project is to deliver by 2021 broadband services with a speed of more than 30 megabits per second to every household and business in Scotland. I commend to the Minister the Audit Scotland report from the spring of this year. It is bathed in the language we would expect of auditors, but it identified a clear problem with the R100 scheme, in that the timescale is unachievable given that the contract will not be awarded until next year—2019—and the objective is for 2021.

There is no adequate, long-term overall strategy. The Scottish Government's objective is totally unrealistic. They are touting R100 as a catch-all solution to Scotland's digital gap, as if saying the word often enough will get everyone to believe that. That approach belies the complexity and difficulty of getting the remaining properties connected to a superfast internet connection.

It is time for the Minister to reassess this issue and the UK Government's whole approach to broadband delivery, especially in Scotland. Our vision should be for universal fibre-to-premise provision. We all know why that is necessary. We all know it will create jobs and allow people to live in remote and rural areas, such as those that make up most of my constituency. We all know that this is about educating the young, building viable businesses and providing remote healthcare into the future.

[Stephen Kerr]

We should set an ambition of achieving a fully digitised, connected United Kingdom with a universal service of fibre to premise. That level of ambition will endow the British people with a technological edge. We should support communities to deliver that in every corner of these islands. It is time for the UK Government to really step up to the plate and to deliver for Scotland what the Scottish Government have consistently failed to deliver.

5.13 pm

The Minister for Digital and the Creative Industries (Margot James): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) on securing this important debate on community broadband schemes, which are valuable mechanisms that allow people to group together and work with operators to deliver broadband in their local areas. My hon. Friend is to be congratulated on his passion, his commitment and his knowledge of the issue of rural broadband.

I agree about the importance of supporting rural broadband, given how absolutely essential a decent broadband speed is for individuals to lead their lives today. Broadband is as important as any other utility, and it is fundamental to the country's growth, prosperity and competitiveness.

The Chancellor has set ambitious targets for full-fibre, rather than copper, roll-out, aiming for nationwide coverage by 2033 and to ensure that at least half the country is covered by 2025. Rural broadband is a particular priority for this Government, and we are focused on ensuring that the whole UK, including Scotland, benefits from this new strategy.

Everyone should be able to participate in our digital society to use Government services, to complete homework, to communicate with family and to work in the digital age. Of course, future opportunities and benefits from remote healthcare and learning, and technologies such as artificial intelligence and the internet of things, mean that 5G will have to be available to everyone in the future, no matter where they live or work. That will also depend on fibre roll-out. The Government are working hard to make sure that that happens.

We published the future telecoms infrastructure review in July 2018, setting out a national long-term strategy for digital connectivity to meet the Government's full-fibre target. I agree with my hon. Friend on the definition of what we mean by a full-fibre connection. We do not mean a hybrid version; we mean fibre to the premises. I sympathise with what he said about what I agree is misleading advertising.

We recognise in our strategy that although commercial investment will deliver in most parts of the country, there is a case for Government support for investment in those areas where a commercial solution is highly unlikely to be found. We are committed to reaching those rural areas first, in what we call the outside-in approach. Those living in such areas—around 10% of the country—will be able to benefit from gigabit connectivity at the same pace as the rest of the country with public investment. Everyone should be able to benefit from world-class connectivity, and we are committed to nobody, and no part of the country, being left behind.

We have made good progress. The £1.7 billion Broadband Delivery UK superfast programme has provided access to superfast broadband for 4.75 million homes and businesses that would otherwise not have got such connectivity, and we have now reached 95% access to superfast broadband for the country as a whole. I recognise that that still means that 5% of the country, an above average amount of which is in rural areas, is still waiting for superfast connectivity.

Despite the success we have enjoyed, there is a tough challenge in remoter areas, including parts of my hon. Friend's constituency. As he said in his eloquent speech, there is clearly more that our Government, and indeed the Scottish Government, can and should be doing. The Government have invested more than double the per-head funding for the superfast programme in Scotland compared with England, which has enabled Digital Scotland to provide superfast access to 93.7% of premises in Scotland.

As my hon. Friend said, we are investing £200 million in the rural gigabit connectivity programme that was announced in the Chancellor's Budget a few weeks ago. The programme will bring full fibre to remote and rural areas, delivering improved connectivity that is reliable, gigabit-capable and future-proofed. It will mean that people living in rural areas will no longer have to put up with slower speeds than those in urban areas. That will provide the connectivity that businesses in rural areas need to survive and thrive, and the recent evaluation of the superfast programme showed a combined increase in turnover of £9 billion for local businesses that benefited from that roll-out.

The rural gigabit connectivity programme will trial models for local hubs in rural areas, starting with primary schools, alongside vouchers for funding full-fibre connectivity to tens of thousands of homes and businesses across the UK, which will benefit from a fibre spine that will enable gigabit-capable connections. The project will be delivered directly through providers, and that applies to the money that is being made available to Scotland as well. We will work with agencies, including the Scottish Government, to identify suitable schools and public buildings, but the money will go to providers, not the Scottish Government directly. The public buildings will likely be in areas that are sparsely populated and mostly rural, including the borderlands, as well as Cornwall and the Welsh valleys. Community broadband schemes can play a valuable part in improving connectivity in such rural areas, particularly by driving innovation and participation locally.

My hon. Friend detailed unsettling accounts of the bureaucratic difficulties that have been posed to community operations that seek to benefit from the community broadband project schemes. I congratulate his constituents David Johnston and Richard Harris on persevering against the odds to establish the Balquhidder community broadband project. I also congratulate them on winning the Scottish rural action transport and infrastructure award for 2018 for their fantastic efforts. This really should not be as difficult as my hon. Friend has detailed.

I have something encouraging to say. We constantly work, through the very good barrier-busting taskforce that we have established in the Department, to break down barriers in rural areas. We have worked to give providers greater rights to access land and a fairer price for exercising their wayleaves, and we are considering introducing legislation on reinforcing wayleaves' rights

of access and new builds, so we recognise what my hon. Friend has said and we are taking action. As a precursor to legislation, when parliamentary time permits, the barrier-busting taskforce has issued a lot of guidance to local bodies and providers on how to use the changes in rules that we have at least overseen in the past 18 months.

Community broadband schemes play a very valuable role, and we want to encourage community networks. We have published guidance on our website to help to support those who are interested in following this route. We do recognise the challenges and complexities, and we want to work with partners to ensure we are able to mitigate risks and challenges, particularly in places such as rural Scotland and the Welsh valleys. All that builds on our £290 million investment into the local full-fibre networks programme and the gigabit broadband voucher scheme. They have already benefited many rural areas and aim to catalyse the commercial roll-out of full-fibre broadband. Both programmes are UK-wide, and I am pleased to say that we have already seen a high level of engagement with the programmes in Scotland. The Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire area was selected as one of our market test areas for the gigabit broadband voucher scheme, and the highlands made a successful bid for £4.7 million in the first round of the challenge fund. These interventions will help further to reduce the footprint of the R100 programme. We welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to that programme, and officials are working closely to ensure that the R100 superfast ambitions can align with and support our full-fibre ambitions.

As well as this vital work to deliver connectivity that is fit for the long term, we have also introduced the broadband universal service obligation, which will ensure that, by 2020, everyone across the UK has a clear, enforceable right to request high-speed broadband of at least 10 megabits per second. The USO is designed as a safety net and will at least ensure that no one has to wait to access Government services and to start to take part in our digital society, but the target of delivering nationwide full-fibre coverage by 2033 is challenging and will require industry, the UK Government and the devolved Administrations to work together. The fact that we successfully hit our target of 95% superfast coverage is a huge credit to the hard work, skill and commitment of the Broadband Delivery UK team and all our partners, including Digital Scotland, and I thank them. I also commend my predecessors in my current role: my right hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock), the former Secretary of State; and my right hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey).

I again congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling. I look forward to hearing more about the success of the community project he spoke about in the House today, and to building on that success and encouraging other community projects to take inspiration from his constituents.

Question put and agreed to.

5.25 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 15 November 2018

[MR ADRIAN BAILEY *in the Chair*]

BACKBENCH BUSINESS

Early Years Intervention

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE

Select Committee statement

1.30 pm

Mr Adrian Bailey (in the Chair): We begin with the Select Committee statement. Norman Lamb will speak on the publication of the Eleventh Report of the Science and Technology Committee, “Evidence-based early years intervention”, for up to 10 minutes, during which no interventions may be taken. At the conclusion of his statement I will call Members to put questions on the subject of the statement, and call Norman Lamb to respond to each in turn. Normally, I would say that Members can only expect to be called once to ask a question, but in view of the lack of numbers here, I may be a little more generous.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD): I suspect there may be a drama unfolding elsewhere today, which limits the numbers in Westminster Hall. Nevertheless, I rise to make a statement following the publication this week of the report of my Committee—the Science and Technology Committee—on “Evidence-based early years intervention”.

Before I explain why we conducted this inquiry and set out our key findings, I thank all the organisations and individuals—there were more than a hundred in total—who provided us with written evidence, and the 26 individuals who gave oral evidence. This is very much an evidence-based report and it would not have been possible without their input.

Around one in every two adults in the UK has suffered at least one adverse childhood experience, which could have been abuse, neglect or growing up in some other difficult situation, such as in a household where someone suffers from substance abuse problems or domestic violence. The trauma that such experiences cause the child is tragedy enough. However, there is now strong evidence to demonstrate that those who suffer such experiences as a child are significantly more likely to encounter further problems in later life—problems such as mental or physical ill health, worklessness or involvement with the criminal justice system. Risk increases with increased exposure to adversity. Paragraph 7 of our report says that,

“surveys by Public Health Wales have reported a significantly increased prevalence of problems including health-harming behaviour, poor mental wellbeing and chronic disease among those who had suffered four or more adverse childhood experiences compared to those who had suffered none.”

However, that need not be the case. Early intervention is an approach that aims to address these problems before they become significant and difficult to overcome. It can take the form of parenting programmes, behavioural classes for children, or programmes supporting early years child development, among other things. We know

that it works. The Early Intervention Foundation has reviewed studies of over 118 early intervention programmes and found that 45 of them demonstrated robust evidence of positive impact. Similarly, the Children and Parents Service in Manchester has real-world evidence showing that early intervention can significantly reduce a child’s risk of neglect or abuse—in other words, it can stop the trauma from happening in the first place.

As well as transforming lives, early intervention can save taxpayers’ money. The Early Intervention Foundation has estimated that the cost of “late” intervention—in other words, not intervening early—is at least £16.6 billion every year, and that is without taking into account the positive economic impact of people living more fulfilled lives.

The Scottish and Welsh Governments and some local authorities in England have made early intervention to address childhood adversity and trauma a priority. However, the Government in Westminster have not yet seized the opportunity. Instead, local authorities in England are essentially left to their own devices, without central support or scrutiny. We know that pockets of good practice exist, but the Early Intervention Foundation told us that it experiences

“lots of examples where we see a gap between what we know from robust, peer-reviewed literature and what happens in local services and systems”.

With fragmented and variable delivery of early intervention across England, vulnerable children are being horribly failed around the country. That is why my Committee is urging the Government to draw up a national strategy on early intervention, to empower and encourage local authorities to deliver effective, sustainable and evidence-based early intervention.

In addition to providing the impetus to seize the opportunity of early intervention, the national strategy should address several major challenges that we heard that local authorities face in delivering evidence-based early intervention. Among those challenges are, first, that awareness of the impact of childhood adversity and how it can be addressed could be greater among those who work with children. So the “early years workforce” should be, first, defined, and then training should be reviewed to ensure that this workforce has the knowledge that they need to be effective in their work.

Secondly, the collection and analysis of appropriate data can help to identify those families who would benefit from early intervention, as well as providing insight on how well different early intervention approaches are working. The national strategy should identify what data ought to be collected and support local authorities in delivering “data-driven” services. At the moment, the early years are almost like a data-free zone. It is an extraordinary situation that, as children and adults grow, we collect an enormous amount of data about them nationally, including in the school system. We have an understanding of what is going on later, but in the early years there is no national data—it is fascinating. Therefore, the problem is that we are spending a lot of public money without knowing whether it is being spent effectively.

Thirdly, the strategy should make use of the growing field of “implementation science” to maximise the chances of success for efforts to deliver effective and sustainable early intervention. We want a central specialist team to be set up in the Early Intervention Foundation to help

[Norman Lamb]

local authorities to deliver the national strategy and apply the evidence of what we know works around the country.

Some improvements to the delivery of early intervention in England can be made without requiring substantial new funding; no doubt that is music to the ears of the Minister for School Standards, who is present. Nevertheless, the Government should recognise the long-term cost savings available through effective early intervention and be willing to make the upfront investments now, so that we can save money in the long run. The new strategy should seek to drive a general shift in the focus of current expenditure on “late interventions”, which are inevitably less effective, so that we focus more on earlier intervention.

Some programmes are already in place that aim to identify families that are in need of support and that help to provide that support. Foremost among them is the Healthy Child programme, under which every child should receive five mandatory health visits before the age of three. However, Public Health England statistics show that, other than the newborn visit, only around 80% of children receive such visits. Without this interaction with health visitors, opportunities to identify families who would benefit from support are missed. The Government must set out a clear strategy to show how they intend to increase coverage of the five mandated visits to 100%. They must also make sure that such a strategy does not simply increase the strain on the health-visiting workforce, thereby diluting the impact that they can have on each family.

We also call upon the Government to state clearly their position on the future of the Sure Start programme and children’s centres. A consultation on these centres was announced in 2015, but it has still not been launched. In the meantime, Ofsted’s regular inspections of these centres have been suspended, pending the outcome of the consultation, which has not happened yet. Local authorities need clarity about the future of these centres. If the Government intend to hold a consultation, they should launch it within the next three months.

To conclude, early intervention that is used to tackle childhood adversity can transform lives and save costs to the Government—a win-win. There is now a pressing need for a fundamental shift in the Government’s approach to early intervention, targeting childhood adversity and trauma, and applying the evidence of what we know works. The Government should match the ambition of the Scottish and Welsh Governments, and build on the example set by a number of English local authorities, to

make early intervention and childhood adversity a priority, and to set out a clear national strategy by the end of this parliamentary Session to empower and encourage local authorities to deliver effective, sustainable and evidence-based early intervention.

Mr Adrian Bailey (in the Chair): I now invite questions. I stress that they should be questions, not speeches.

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I congratulate the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb). He rightly said that the Scottish Government already have a strategic plan in place. In fact, they held a conference recently on adverse childhood experiences, and that issue is at the core of what they are trying to do. The right hon. Gentleman mentioned in his speech that he did not think additional funding, or much additional funding, would be required to carry out this plan. However, at a time when so many local authorities in England are failing and overspending their children’s budget, does he think that this is actually going to happen?

Norman Lamb: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. I applaud the Scottish Government, the NHS in Scotland, and the Scottish schools system for grasping this nettle, understanding what the evidence shows, and acting upon it. We say in the report that there are things local authorities can do now without any additional funding, and in a way, that is demonstrated by the fact that some local authorities are doing them. Those local authorities are looking at the evidence and applying it, and using the money that they have in the most effective way. I particularly applaud Greater Manchester for that. Dr Caroline White, who leads the Children and Parents Service in Greater Manchester, acted as expert adviser to the Committee inquiry. A lot can be learned from places such as Greater Manchester.

However, the Committee also makes the point to Government that there is a prize to be won if we invest more in effective early intervention: not only transforming lives, but saving money for the state further down the track. It is a powerful case of “invest to save”, and I want to indicate to the Minister—I do not know whether he intends to say something—that I am really keen to work with the Departments on this. It is not in any way a party political issue: there is a strong consensus on our Committee in support of the sort of action we are calling for. We could achieve a real gain by applying the evidence that we demonstrate in the report to make a difference to children’s lives, and I am keen to work collaboratively to make that happen.

Anti-bullying Week

1.43 pm

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): I beg to move,
That this House has considered anti-bullying week 2018.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bailey, and I am grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for granting today's debate. I am also grateful that we are able to have this debate during Anti-bullying Week, as was made possible last year when a similar debate was secured by the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands). Obviously, today is quite a busy day for many parliamentary colleagues, so I fear that some of the Members who I had expected to be with us will not be here, but it is important that we mark Anti-bullying Week in this way.

Like many constituency Members, many of my Fridays are spent visiting local schools—I should think all colleagues do that. I try to visit a school every Friday, and I find that they are all trying very hard to create an environment in which children feel safe, supported, and free from bullying. Just last week, I visited Shirley Community Primary School and had some wonderful conversations with the staff and the children, who were running around a field doing the daily mile. I have to say that they were rather better at it than I was, but it was still good to get some exercise. However, despite all the hard work that teachers are doing, it is important that we spend some time considering the challenges that we face in our schools, and particularly how we teach our children to treat each other. This week provides an opportunity for people to reflect on that question, and creates a space for staff and students to have those conversations about how we treat one another—conversations that are sometimes difficult.

Anti-bullying Week is organised by the Anti-Bullying Alliance, which is a fantastic coalition of anti-bullying charities. Anti-bullying Week reaches 75% of schools in England, touching over 6 million children and young people. It was excellent to see the splendid event organised at Speaker's House yesterday, which a number of people came here to celebrate. Anti-bullying Week involves many charities, youth organisations and schools, and is used to provide the resources and tools to raise awareness. This year, there have been specific events on particular days, and today is "Stop Speak Support"—cyber-bullying day.

As we all know, sadly, with the rise of social media and technology, a whole range of new challenges has come along. The playground no longer stops when the bell goes. Whereas these issues could once have been dealt with in class, they now extend well beyond the playground, often on the way home and outside school. Sadly, one in five teenagers has experienced cyber-bullying in just the past two months, and children who have been cyber-bullied are more likely than their peers to be lonely, anxious or depressed. I think we are all aware of the rising numbers of young people who are presenting with mental health issues. It is right that the Government are tackling that problem, but of course, it is not just the Government who should respond to it. Social media companies must also take some responsibility and create the kinds of environments in which respectful conduct is required, especially for children.

Section 103 of the Digital Economy Act 2017 requires the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to publish a code of practice for providers of online

social media platforms. That is good, but we also have to make sure that that code of practice is enforced, and sadly, it seems at times that it is not being enforced sufficiently well. Facebook, for example, has faced criticism in recent months for pushing back its targets for tackling cyber-bullying. I believe that those mega-corporations can be a power for good, but they also have to take responsibility for maintaining acceptable practices on their platforms.

The Diana Award, which is an anti-bullying charity, runs the Be Strong Online ambassador programme, which empowers students and staff to take a peer-led approach to digital resilience and helps teach young people to explore the digital world safely. It is good to hear that since 2016, over 1,200 young people and staff members have been trained as Be Strong Online ambassadors. That is an example of how we can help improve schools across the board and work with social media companies to improve the quality of our online interactions.

My interest in, and awareness of this topic came not just from having been a school governor and chair of governors in a past life—like, I suspect, many of my colleagues—but from a strong constituency link with Red Balloon, one of the most highly respected charities working in this field. That charity runs learning centres and schools for bullied children. It was created 22 years ago by a constituent of mine, Dr Carrie Herbert, who is a real force of nature and a force for change. She started that charity—in her own kitchen—when she saw some of the problems that children were facing, and the charity's story featured in national newspapers over the weekend.

I will say a little about the report that was in *The Guardian* on Saturday. One particular young person was prepared to tell her story, and in many ways it probably speaks for many others. Hannah Letters, who is 17, explained:

"I struggled with the transition to secondary school"—

we are all aware that that is a problem in many cases—
"and found it hard to make friends."

This is very sad to read, but:

"She was sent messages on social media, telling her that no one liked her. 'One of the girls turned and said to me, 'If you had looked after your mother better, she wouldn't have got cancer.'"

That is an awful thing to say to any child. She said:

"I had such low self-esteem by then, anything she said I believed. I started to blame myself."

By the time she was 13, she was self-harming. The article states:

"The bullies were constantly on her mind and she would wake up screaming from nightmares."

That is a terrible story, but sadly it is not unique.

Hannah was not particularly happy with the response she got from her school. In a familiar cycle, each time she or her mother complained, the bullying got worse. The article continues:

"When the bullies physically attacked her, it was the last straw for Letters' mother. She took her off the school roll. That meant her school was absolved of its legal responsibility to provide her with an education. She became yet another statistic: one of the 16,000 children aged 11 to 15 who... 'self-exclude' from school due to bullying."

That is where Red Balloon came in.

Hannah joined Red Balloon three years ago, and enrolled in its education programmes and received help with wellbeing support. She is planning on studying

[Daniel Zeichner]

medicine at university. That is a huge turnaround from the situation she found herself in a few years ago, and it is not a unique story: Red Balloon turns around the lives of students every year, but it is almost a unique service, and here is the rub. The evidence from such institutions as Red Balloon shows that intervention works—it really does—but the truth is that it is also very expensive.

Although intervention looks expensive up front, in the long term it is almost certainly cheaper to intervene and make the difference that Red Balloon can make. For most local authorities, the amounts of money required to put in that intervention would be unthinkable in the current context. In fact, they do not release the money they would have been spending on that education. That is perhaps understandable, given that many find themselves in dire straits. While I suspect we will hear some warm words this afternoon, the real truth is that, although we can see what works, our choice as a society is not to do it, and that should weigh heavily on us. In the meantime, until we can do better, we must support schools to tackle bullying on a daily basis.

Mainstream education must be able to teach children how to treat each other with respect, not just how to pass exams. I suspect there might not be complete agreement with what I am about to say, but my sense is that many schools are increasingly pressured to focus on exams. Many are forced to limit the subjects they offer due to funding pressures. It has been controversial over recent years, but schools have been able to give less attention to some subjects because of the English baccalaureate. In some cases, the decline of the opportunity to take part in arts education can have possibly unintended consequences.

In recent weeks, teachers and academics have written to me with their concerns about their students' opportunities to develop creative skills and self-expression, which are vital for getting them into work and university, for being part of the community and for expressing themselves. I suspect that taking arts education out of school education can reduce the opportunity for the discussions that arise around the arts, such as how we relate to each other and the kind of society we want to live in.

Returning to the positive, Anti-bullying Week offers schools the opportunity to engage in those discussions and provides the kind of platform on which children can think further about those very important questions, which do not always appear on exam papers.

This year, Anti-bullying Week has the theme "Choose Respect". It encourages us to own our behaviour and to remember that we all have a choice in how we behave and that respecting each other is an active choice. In school, we should learn how to relate to those who agree with us and those who do not, and to those from different backgrounds and those with different interests. We take those skills with us into our futures and use them for the rest of our lives.

Elizabeth Nassem, a researcher at Birmingham City University, wrote in *The Guardian* a few months ago:

"Any school trying to tackle bullying needs to look beyond the 'bully' and 'victim' labels. Instead, it's helpful to consider bullying as a spectrum of negative interactions that range from mild to severe, such as name-calling and hitting. Ask the children in your school about their experiences of bullying, why children might bully others, and how they think bullying should be addressed... Teachers should consistently speak to children respectfully,

listen to children, respond to their views and take time to understand their perspectives. Pupils are then more likely to then do the same with their peers."

That fits in very well with this year's Anti-bullying Week theme of "Choose Respect".

There is also a need to look at the disproportionate amount of bullying that some particular groups experience, including disabled children and those with special educational needs, as well as those who experience bullying based on race and faith. Looked-after children and young carers also suffer disproportionately. By having discussions at school about bullying, and how children can work to choose respect, I hope that can be addressed.

One section of society that is sadly all too often the victim of bullying is people with disabilities. According to the charity Leonard Cheshire Disability, 30% of disabled adults in the UK say they have experienced hostile behaviour motivated by their disability. That is three in 10. That is a distressing statistic and the impact can be chilling, with concern about hostile behaviour reportedly preventing one disabled adult in three from going out in their local area. That makes loneliness and isolation even worse.

There are things that can be done. Since 2014, Leonard Cheshire has run a successful scheme in Northern Ireland with the police to support disability hate crime survivors. It is called, "Be Safe Stay Safe", and it provides independent advocacy support from qualified, experienced advocates to victims and witnesses of disability hate crime to ensure accessibility to the police and the wider criminal justice system. Will the Minister look at how that experience could be transferred to the rest of the United Kingdom?

Others who also suffer include those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender; ethnic or faith minorities; young carers; and looked-after children. The Anti-Bullying Alliance found that one child in four aged from seven to 15 reports being frequently bullied, while more than a third of disabled children and those with special educational needs are victims of regular bullying. Nearly half of school pupils say that their friends use discriminatory language towards LGBT people. Last year, a poll by the Diana Award found that 61% of school staff had witnessed racism-driven bullying. That is totally unacceptable, and it shows that even in 2018 we have a long way to go to stamp out racism entirely in our schools.

The Anti-Bullying Alliance is calling for urgent action to protect children at higher risk of bullying, and for mental health and wellbeing leads in each school, as proposed in the Green Paper on mental health, so as to have a responsibility to prevent bullying. The alliance thinks, and I agree, that that should be part of a co-ordinated, whole-school approach. While today's debate is not party political, I gently make the point that these things all require resourcing. The relatively paltry amounts made available in the Budget are unlikely to stretch across all the existing pressures that schools face alongside such new initiatives. If we are going to do it, it has to be funded properly; otherwise, it will fall on already very stretched teachers.

The issue has been addressed by Government and Opposition MPs. By law, all state schools must have a behaviour policy in place that includes measures to prevent all forms of bullying among pupils. That policy is, of course, decided by the school, and all teachers, pupils and parents should be told about it. The Government have said that the Department for Education is working

with schools to help them to create an atmosphere of respect that will reduce bullying behaviour both offline and online. I understand that the Minister has written in *The Telegraph* on the need for effective anti-bullying policies both online and offline. There is clearly widespread understanding of the issues.

I hope that we hear from the Minister that he will seek extra funding from his colleagues to support schools in their attempts to tackle these deep-seated and important issues. We will have a spending review next year, and it is hard to imagine a more important issue that could be addressed to tackle long-term societal problems. I welcome the opportunity to hear from the Minister so that, on what has been a complicated day in this place, he can give some good news to bring us to the end of Anti-bullying Week.

2 pm

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bailey, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) on securing this important debate, raising awareness and championing the cause of eradicating bullying.

It is Anti-bullying Week, and the theme is to choose respect. As the hon. Gentleman rightly outlined, the prevalence of bullying is increasing, including online and cyber-bullying where the bullying never ends. It does not end when children leave the playground or leave school; it continues. The devastating impact that that has on the mental health of young people should not be forgotten. He also rightly spoke of the tragic experience of one of his young constituents, and I am sure that many more people could speak to that experience.

Although today much of the debate and news coverage will be about Brexit and the next Cabinet Minister to resign, someone, somewhere, is experiencing bullying right now. Whether in the playground or the workplace, bullying affects people from all different backgrounds, and those at different stages and ages in life. On behalf of the Scottish National party, I fully support today's debate. Brexit reigns strong, but we must continue to use this House to discuss important issues that affect people every day.

The SNP takes bullying very seriously, and believes that there is no place in Scotland for prejudice or discrimination. Core to that is the belief that everyone deserves to be treated fairly and that bullying of any kind is therefore unacceptable. Where it occurs it must be addressed quickly and effectively. In schools, it often falls on headteachers, teachers and local authorities to decide how bullying is tackled.

The Scottish Government expect all schools to develop and implement an anti-bullying policy, which should be reviewed and updated on a regular basis. The hon. Member for Cambridge spoke about the experience in England. I can speak only of the Scottish Government's experience and responsibilities. They have ensured that schools have an anti-bullying policy, which should be at the heart of every whole-school approach to create a positive and welcoming ethos. We want all young people to learn tolerance, respect, equality and good citizenship to address and prevent prejudice, as well as to build healthy relationships.

Bullying can take many forms, and can be based on prejudices. That is why the Scottish Government have been working with the campaign Time for Inclusive

Education. I give credit to Jordan and Liam, who have worked tirelessly with the Scottish Government to push forward on the campaign to ensure that schools deal with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex bullying, discrimination and prejudice. That is why the SNP Scottish Government will now include LGBT rights in the Scottish curriculum, which will send a strong message throughout the world that Scotland is a progressive country and that bullying will not be tolerated.

In November 2017, the Scottish Government published their anti-bullying guidance: "Respect for All: The National Approach to Anti-Bullying for Scotland's Children and Young People". The guidance provides a holistic approach to anti-bullying that makes it clear that all types of bullying are unacceptable, and that adults involved in young people's lives have a role to play in preventing and responding to bullying. It includes guidance on prejudice-based bullying, recording and monitoring of online and offline bullying, labelling, and the impact and outcomes of bullying.

We believe that the focus must be on prevention and early intervention, and I echo the sentiments expressed by the hon. Member for Cambridge: that requires resources and funding, and cannot be achieved otherwise. It must also be reflected in anti-bullying policies. However, it is one thing to have a policy; ensuring that it is implemented in practice is very different.

The most successful interventions are embedded within a positive ethos and inclusive culture. Such interventions are more likely to achieve positive outcomes and destinations for young people. I am hopeful that with anti-bullying guidance and LGBT-inclusive education in Scotland we will begin to shape the attitudes of young people in Scotland, encouraging them to celebrate their differences. Inclusive education is essential to all young people, and it is high time that we created the conditions for a culture of inclusion and understanding of the impact of prejudice and discrimination. Implementing such policies will go some way to securing that.

We also see bullying in workplaces, including this one. It would be remiss of me not to mention the Dame Laura Cox report, which was a damning indictment of the culture of bullying, harassment and sexual harassment in Parliament. With the report, and the working group led by the Leader of the House, we have seen just how pervasive the toxic culture of bullying and harassment is within Parliament and politics more widely. It is important that we recognise that not only MPs' staff, but many staff who work in various capacities across the House and across Parliament, are on the receiving end of such behaviour.

The SNP fully accepts and supports the need for urgent change in this place, because ultimately, people should practise what they preach. We must set a gold standard for workplaces, and ensure that other businesses and sectors across the country can emulate and follow the guidance and practices that we implement here. In that regard, Parliament has lately let people down, but that can be rectified by challenging any form of workplace bullying and harassment, particularly in Parliament. Until we get that right, we are not in a position to preach or to tell anyone else how they should manage their workplace. By ensuring that everyone here works together with dignity and respect, we can start to change the workplace culture in this place, and we can start truly to lead by example.

[Angela Crawley]

As the hon. Member for Cambridge rightly highlighted, this subject touches on the lives of all people, whether they are LGBT, disabled, from faith backgrounds, of different races, young carers or looked-after children. It affects a wide variety of young people from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences, but I wanted to touch on a particular case, because when bullying is not tackled effectively there are tragic consequences.

That is what happened in the case of 12-year-old Rachel Steven from Burnbank in Hamilton, who attended St John Ogilvie High School, which happens to be my old high school. Although the school lies outside my constituency—in that of the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Ged Killen)—I am sure he would support me in saying that I am particularly invested in this case.

St John Ogilvie High School was the school I grew up in, and I would like to think that any young person could aspire to come to this place too. Sadly, Rachel, who was described as a “lively, bright young girl” by her headteacher, took her own life in September this year. It is alleged that Rachel had been taunted by bullies for years, and for her to have taken such extreme action to escape the bullies shows just how difficult life can be for such victims. It is incumbent on us all to do our part to try to eradicate bullying, take seriously any reports of bullying that come to us and remember how deeply bullies can affect their victims.

No one should be made to feel like that and no young person should take their own life to escape that experience. In an ideal world, no one would experience bullying. Let us seek to make that ideal a reality. In Parliament, we are responsible for implementing policy and legislation, and for leading by example. More could always be done to eradicate bullying, and we have more to do in this place. I hope that the Minister, in responding to this debate on Anti-bullying Week, will commit to what more he can do to ensure that bullying in schools and workplaces is eradicated, and that workplace culture is changed.

2.9 pm

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bailey, on quite a momentous day in Parliament. If I may tease the Minister gently, let me say that it is great to see at least one Minister left in place. When I came in today, I saw on social media the headline “May resigns”, but then I realised that it was about Paul May, chief executive of Patisserie Valerie—so the Minister can rest easy for a few more minutes.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner), who is passionate about the subject and is a great representative for his university town. This is a timely debate; as the hon. Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley) said, online bullying is a horrible thing. Holding public office in Parliament, which she spoke about, is a real gift.

There are two types of power: power over people and power with people. Power over people is the worst form of coercion that can be exercised by anyone, especially when it comes from elected officials. It has all the elements of bullying: it is aggressive, belittling and coercive. I am sure that the Minister agrees—as you do, Mr Bailey—that in this place we have to do more to root it out, because people should be treated with respect and dignity in the workplace.

To give an example, we display Parliament’s new anti-bullying policy in my constituency office in Manchester. It occasionally forms part of our team meeting, so that we can make sure that we treat one another and our constituents with respect and dignity, and that they treat us in the same way. We will neither kowtow to people who bully us, nor bully them. Poor behaviours should be pointed out. Many staff in this place have suffered horrendously over the past few years, and I look forward to the day when we take a more collegiate approach. It is not just about how we stop bullying, but about how we deal with it when it happens. How this mother of Parliaments cleans up its own act will be key.

The theme of this year’s Anti-bullying Week is “Choose Respect”. It is centred around the fact that bullying is a behaviour choice, and that children and young people can set a positive example by opting to respect each other at school, in their homes and communities and online. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Chris Elmore) for coming forward and sharing his own personal experience of bullying—seven years of being punched in the face, kicked down the stairs and mentally tortured so badly that he had three breakdowns. It was not until he was assaulted so badly that the police were called that he felt able, as a vulnerable teenager, to speak up.

As my hon. Friend’s personal story so eloquently portrays, bullying can be devastating for the victim. It permeates every minute of every single day, even when the victim is not in the presence of those who are causing them harm. Bullying is intensified when it happens in a school environment, because in any given school day there will be times when no teacher or staff member is present to spot it and stop it. Nor is it confined to physical space, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge points out: an estimated 5.43 million young people in the UK have experienced cyber-bullying, with 1.26 million subjected daily to extreme cyber-bullying.

The Department for Education’s guidance for schools, headteachers, staff and governing bodies on preventing and tackling bullying states:

“Every school must have measures in place to prevent all forms of bullying.”

However, does the Minister really think that schools can invest in strategies to prevent bullying, when across the country—including in the Prime Minister’s constituency—they are having to write to parents to ask for resources? As a result of cuts, they have fewer adults in the classroom to provide essential teaching support. Larger class sizes mean that children do not get as much attention as they used to.

I suspect that the Government do not have a statistical database, but statistics suggest that more than 16,000 young people are absent from school because of bullying. Bullying has a huge impact on young people’s self-esteem, and 30% of young people have gone on to self-harm as a result. Perhaps most devastatingly of all, 10% of young people have attempted to commit suicide as a result of bullying. The impacts of bullying continue to ripple out long after young people have escaped their tormentors; those who have been bullied are more than twice as likely to have difficulty in keeping a job or in committing to saving.

The sad reality is that some children who need mental health support as a result of bullying will leave school and move into adulthood without ever getting it, because

our mental health services are also in a funding crisis. Looked-after children are reported to experience bullying at a much higher rate than their peers. Almost every single looked-after child has already endured some form of trauma, and at least 45% enter care with a diagnosable mental health condition. As the Government are now presiding over the largest number of children in care since the 1980s—in March 2017 it reached 72,670—can the Minister explain what the Department for Education is doing to provide specialist support for them when they are subjected to bullying?

Children with disabilities or special educational needs also experience bullying at a higher rate than others, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge pointed out. The long-held view, which dates right back to the Education Act 1981 and is supported by Ofsted, is that well-resourced mainstream schools are best placed to improve the learning and social environment for disabled and non-disabled learners alike. Children with special educational needs are increasingly being pushed out of mainstream schools; recent figures suggest that 19,000 children were off-rolled between years 10 and 11, and the Government do not know where 10,000 of them went on to. In this day and age, when we are much more aware of child sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation, those figures are very worrying indeed.

In 2016, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child examined the Government's compliance with the UN convention on the rights of the child and found that they were failing in 150 areas across the board. What has the Minister done to address that since the committee's report?

It is estimated that one child in every single class experiences severe bullying. I know that the Minister agrees that that is one child too many. Speaking as a former primary school teacher, I know that children will have woken up this morning feeling sick at the thought of going to school because of the fear of the damage that their bullies will wreak on them throughout the day. Some will never have made it to school at all, while others will have spent the whole day anxious and unable to concentrate in class.

We go into teaching because we believe in the value of education and in its power to create social mobility and ambition for all. I hope that the Minister will share with us how he intends to ensure that no child has to experience bullying, and that all children can reap the full benefits that a good education can provide. I hope that he will share in the theme of Anti-bullying Week by choosing to respect our schools and teachers and giving them the resource and support that they need to beat the bullies.

2.18 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bailey. I congratulate the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) on securing this debate. As he and all hon. Members present know, and as we have heard today, particularly from the hon. Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley), bullying can have a devastating effect on children and their families.

I offer my sincere condolences to the family and friends of Rachel Steven. Every death of a child is a tragedy. I cannot comment on Scottish procedure, but in England all child deaths, including suicides, will be

reviewed by the local authority and the clinical commissioning group, which will analyse what has happened and ensure that any necessary recommendations or changes are made as a consequence of the tragedy.

We must not let up on our efforts to eradicate bullying. Anti-bullying Week gives us an opportunity to maintain focus on this important issue and highlight the positive things that we can all do to help stamp out bullying. Every child's experience at school should be a happy one. We want schools to be safe, calm places in which teachers can teach uninterrupted and pupils can succeed.

The Government have sent a clear message to schools that bullying—for whatever reason—is unacceptable, and that they need the right tools to tackle it. As the hon. Member for Cambridge said in his opening remarks, all schools are legally required to have a behaviour policy with measures to prevent all forms of bullying. We have ensured that schools have a range of powers and support to help them respond effectively when bullying takes place.

We know that bullying still happens, and that it can have serious and long-lasting effects on children's education and mental health. Tackling bullying means creating a culture where difference is respected and bullying behaviour is not tolerated by staff, pupils and parents. That is why the theme of this Anti-bullying Week—"Choose Respect"—is so important. There are pupils who are more likely to be targeted because of some young people's attitudes towards those who are different from themselves, which is not the way it should be. That is why, earlier this year, the Department for Education announced an additional £1 million investment to extend projects led by several anti-bullying organisations until March 2020—the end of the spending review period. That work will support schools to stamp out prejudice and discrimination.

That investment will enable the Anti-Bullying Alliance, which does a phenomenal job, to extend its All Together programme, which focuses on reducing bullying of children with special educational needs and disabilities. It will support a further 300 schools to gain All Together status and provide certified online training for 10,000 professionals. The Anne Frank Trust will further develop its Free to Be debate programme, which encourages young people to think about the importance of tackling prejudice, discrimination and bullying. Over the 18-month extension, it will reach an additional 825 ambassadors and more than 8,000 workshop participants. The Diana Award will extend its peer-to-peer anti-bullying ambassadors programme, training an additional 2,750 young people from a further 270 schools in England over 18 months. As ambassadors, these young people will lead campaigns to empower their student body to have mutual respect for each other and to engage in good, anti-bullying practice.

Earlier this year we also extended the Internet Matters project, which will now run its Make a Noise programme until January 2019. That project supports the reporting of bullying to schools via the tootoot online platform. All four of our grant-funded projects include cyber-bullying as an integral element, and last week the Minister for Women and Equalities announced a further £1 million to extend the anti-homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying programme, which has reached 1,200 schools since 2016.

I had the pleasure of attending the Anti-Bullying Alliance's parliamentary reception in Speaker's House yesterday, which I think the hon. Member for Cambridge

[Nick Gibb]

also attended. That event celebrated Anti-bullying Week and inspired an audience—including fellow Members of Parliament, policy makers, teachers and young people—to take action and unite against bullying. I was proud to present the Anti-Bullying Alliance school staff awards to two remarkable individuals who have gone above and beyond in their school to tackle and stop bullying: Mrs Watkiss from Blue Coat Church of England Academy, and Miss Durrant, a learning mentor from Emerson Valley School.

We know that schools that excel at tackling bullying have created an ethos of good behaviour, where pupils treat each other and staff with respect because they know that it is the right way to behave. This week, the Department for Education published a tool to support schools to develop whole-school approaches that promote respect and discipline. By providing practical advice, guidance and good practice examples of how schools can develop and implement an approach that is shared by the whole school community, the tool builds on the recommendations in Tom Bennett's independent review of behaviour in schools, "Creating a culture: how school leaders can optimise behaviour".

A good school culture that sets a clear structure and clear expectations for pupils can go hand in hand with acknowledging differences. A school where good behaviour and respect is the norm can help teachers to identify and support pupils who might have underlying problems, so alongside the tool we have published an update to our advice on mental health and behaviour in schools. This will help schools to identify pupils whose behaviour might result from an underlying mental health difficulty, and to direct schools towards information about how they can adapt their approaches to support those pupils' individual needs within the context of an approach that is based on clear expectations of behaviour.

It is important also that a respectful school culture permeates every aspect of school life, including what is taught in the classroom. The new mandatory subjects of relationships education, relationships and sex education, and health education will enable schools to deliver high-quality teaching, including on acceptable ways to behave, both online and off, as part of their whole-school approach. The consultation on the draft guidance and regulations closed last week, and we are currently considering the responses; we plan to lay the regulations next year. Under the content for respectful relationships, the draft guidance sets out that pupils should know about the different types of bullying, the impact that it has, the responsibility of bystanders, and how to get help.

As the hon. Member for Cambridge said, today is the first time that Anti-bullying Week has featured a dedicated anti-cyber-bullying day, which is supported by the Royal Foundation's taskforce on the prevention of cyber-bullying. The aim of Stop Speak Support Day is to highlight the issue of cyber-bullying, which we know affects so many children in our schools, as the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane) said. Cyber-bullying is not just a way to bully others anonymously; it can be a means by which face-to-face bullying between pupils at the same school is extended beyond the school day.

Bullying can also start online and follow a child into school. In these circumstances, the effects of cyber-bullying can be felt within the school. Just like face-to-face

bullying, it can have repercussions on behaviour during lessons and throughout the school day. For that reason, the Department for Education has already put in place a number of powers and a range of support to enable schools to prevent and tackle cyber-bullying. Teachers have the power to discipline pupils for poor behaviour that takes place outside the school gates, and we have extended teachers' searching powers so that they can search for and, in certain circumstances, delete inappropriate images or files on electronic devices.

Through the new mandatory subjects of relationships education and relationships and sex education, pupils will be taught about internet safety and harm, including the effects of their online actions on others and knowing how to recognise and display respectful behaviour online. This will complement the computing curriculum, which covers the principles of e-safety at all key stages. The content progresses to reflect the different and escalating risks that young people face, including how to use technology safely, responsibly, respectfully and securely, and where to go for help and support when students have concerns about content or contact on the internet or other online technologies.

We are committed to strengthening the teaching of computing and computer science in schools, so we have launched a new, comprehensive programme to improve the teaching of computing and to drive up participation in computer science, particularly amongst girls. This includes a new national centre for computing and a network of at least 40 hubs throughout the country to support schools to provide resources and training—including elements of e-safety—to primary and secondary schools. The centre will start working with schools this year, and it is backed by £84 million of new funding, which was announced in November 2017.

Children's online life goes beyond what schools can control and influence. Their efforts need to be backed up by a responsible approach from those who provide social media, taking responsibility for what happens when children use their services. There is a range of other work taking place across Government to help tackle cyber-bullying, including the forthcoming joint White Paper from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and the Home Office, which sits at the heart of the Government's response to tackling online harm. The White Paper will be published in the winter and sets out a range of legislative and non-legislative measures that detail how we will tackle online harms.

The hon. Member for Cambridge raised the issue of social media companies and the social media code of practice. As he knows, we published the draft code of practice in May and are continuing to engage with social media providers and others to refine the statutory practice with clear, overarching principles and separate best-practice guidance. Another key message of this year's Anti-bullying Week is that bullying is a behaviour choice, as the hon. Member for Cambridge also mentioned. We want to ensure that all teachers are equipped with the skills to tackle the serious behaviour issues that compromise the safety and wellbeing of pupils, as well as the low-level disruption that too often gets in the way of effective teaching. We are reforming training so that all teachers will be shown in their first two years in the profession how to manage behaviour effectively. Last

month, we announced a £10 million programme to support schools to share best practice and knowledge on behaviour management and classroom management.

We know that bullying can have a serious effect on mental health. Children who suffer bullying can face higher rates of anxiety, depression and self-harm in adulthood. The Department has committed to supporting schools and colleges to promote good mental wellbeing in children, providing a supportive environment for those experiencing problems and securing access to more specialist help for those who need it. The Government's response to the consultation on our green paper, "Transforming children and young people's mental health provision", confirmed our commitment to provide significant further support linked to schools. We will incentivise and support all schools and colleges to identify and train a designated senior lead for mental health, to deliver whole-school approaches to promoting better mental health. The Government will also fund new mental health support teams, or units, which will improve collaboration between schools and specialist services, providing a wider range of support and interventions in or near schools and colleges. These teams will be linked to groups of schools and colleges, and will work closely with other mental health professionals to assess and refer children for other specialist treatments if necessary.

I am grateful for the support that the hon. Member for Cambridge has given to this issue this year. The Government are committed to preventing and tackling bullying, but we know we cannot do that alone. We continue to work with schools and partner organisations to ensure that schools are a safe place for all. I am proud to be a supporter of Anti-bullying Week. I pledge to always choose respect, and I encourage other hon. Members to do the same.

2.32 pm

Daniel Zeichner: I thank colleagues for the positive, constructive tone of the debate and for the very thoughtful contributions. The contribution of the hon. Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley) widened the issue to workplace bullying. The all-party parliamentary group on bullying, which I chair, concentrates very much on bullying in schools, but there is of course no doubt that what is learned at school will hopefully go forward in future and help us to do better, whether here or in other workplaces. I absolutely agree with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane). The cases he raised should give us all pause for thought.

Most of all I congratulate the Anti-Bullying Alliance, led by Martha Evans and her colleagues at the National Children's Bureau. This has become a major event each year for schools and is a fantastic opportunity, as I said in my opening comments, for constructive conversations of the kind that may not always be possible throughout the rest of the year. Today, given the discussions we are having about wider issues and the place of our country in the world, "Choose Respect" could not be a better way of promoting dialogue and constructive conversation. I am sure that on a cross-party basis we can agree to congratulate all those involved, to wish everyone well who has been involved in the campaign during the week, and to make sure that we do everything we can to eliminate bullying in schools and workplaces in the future.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered Anti-Bullying Week 2018.

2.34 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

CABINET OFFICE

Thursday 15 November 2018

Prosperity Fund: Annual Report

ATTORNEY GENERAL

Criminal Justice System: Disclosure

The Attorney General (Mr Geoffrey Cox): Today, carrying forward the work of my predecessor, I have published the results of the Government's review of the efficiency and effectiveness of disclosure in the criminal justice system. This has been laid before Parliament as a Command Paper (Cm 9735), and copies are available in the Vote Office and on gov.uk.

The disclosure of unused material in criminal cases, under the statutory framework of the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996, is a central pillar of the right to a fair trial and a fundamental part of our criminal justice system in England and Wales. My review of disclosure builds on the operational response by the police and Crown Prosecution Service to the challenges of disclosure under the National Disclosure Improvement Plan. The review sets out the next phase of reforms to deliver sustainable change for the long term.

The review identifies the following cross-system themes and makes recommendations for improvement in respect of each of them:

1. Primary legislation continues to provide an appropriate disclosure regime, but in practice the system is not working as effectively or efficiently as it should;
2. Practical reinforcement of the duty to make reasonable lines of inquiry and apply the disclosure test correctly;
3. Pursuing a fair investigation and considering disclosure obligations from the outset, rather than as an afterthought;
4. Proportionate "frontloading" of disclosure preparation and performance;
5. Early and meaningful engagement with disclosure issues by the defence and the judiciary;
6. Harnessing Technology;
7. Data and Management Information;
8. Continuous, sustained oversight and improvement.

These themes reflect the systemic nature of the management of disclosure and the importance of everyone involved—including the police, prosecutors and the defence community—playing their part effectively.

Cases that are stopped and convictions that are quashed because of serious deficiencies in disclosure are neither fair to the complainant nor the defendant and they undermine public confidence in the administration of criminal justice. However, while there have been too many cases where disclosure failures have occurred, it is not a problem in all cases. Victims should not be afraid to come forward and we must not undermine the progress made in encouraging people to report offences.

In order to ensure the review's recommendations are followed through, implementation and oversight will happen under the aegis of the Criminal Justice Board.

[HCWS1083]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Mr David Lidington): I wish to update the House on the progress of the cross-Government prosperity fund (PF) for the financial year 2017-18.

Created two years ago, the £1.2 billion prosperity fund runs over seven years from 2016 to 2023. It forms an integral part of the UK's aid strategy, and official development assistance commitment of 0.7% of GNI.

The prosperity fund is grounded on the premise that economic growth, when sustainable and inclusive, can raise welfare and prosperity in middle income countries. It can also benefit trade and investment with partners such as the United Kingdom. Middle income countries present huge untapped economic potential, yet are home to around 60% of the world's poor. They often seek our partnership and expertise, and opportunities to trade and grow out of poverty rather than traditional aid.

As the Prime Minister set out during her visit to Africa in August this year, we need to work with these countries; sharing our skills, our experience and our resources to tackle the challenges we face, and to deliver prosperity and security for everyone. The prosperity fund is a key driver of this. It removes barriers to trade, builds prosperous partnerships, and enables international and UK business to seize new opportunities. All whilst helping to meet the United Nations global goals for sustainable development and deepening the UK's relationships with countries across the globe.

Following a review of the cross-Government funds, undertaken as part of the national security capability review, ministerial oversight of the prosperity fund and the conflict stability and security fund is now the responsibility of a sub-committee of the National Security Council. The sub-committee, which I chair, ensures that both funds deliver effectively on national security priorities and UK aid objectives. The cross-Government approach of the two funds allows them to deliver interventions that draw on expertise from across Government to tackle today's stubborn global challenges.

The prosperity fund's second annual report details progress made in 2017-18 towards development of the full portfolio: 26 multi-year programmes operating until 2023, across investment in infrastructure and human capital; innovation and technology; increasing trade; financial and economic reform; and ease of doing business. Priority countries and regions include: Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, Nigeria, South Africa, China, India and southeast Asia.

In 2017-18 the total spend for the fund was £63 million, of which £7 million was for non-ODA activities. Several programmes are already delivering, like the DFID led Centre for Global Disaster Protection which is building developing countries' financial resilience to natural disasters to reduce economic and social impacts. Others have been allocated initial funding, like the FCO led global future cities programme, which is providing support to Cape Town to better mitigate against climate-related shocks, such as their recent severe drought, which threatened

jobs and growth in the region. The remainder are going through final stages of approval or procurement before they begin.

A copy of the 2017-18 prosperity fund annual report has been placed in the libraries of both Houses. The publication of the report reflects the Government's continued commitment to transparency in the delivery of official development assistance.

[HCWS1088]

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Agriculture and Fisheries Council

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice): The Agriculture and Fisheries Council will take place on 19 November in Brussels.

As the provisional agenda stands, the primary focus for fisheries will be a Council regulation fixing the fishing opportunities for certain deep-sea fish stocks for 2019 and 2020, for which the Commission is seeking political agreement.

The primary focus for agriculture will be a policy discussion on the common agricultural policy (CAP) post 2020. The Council will discuss two regulations during this item: the first on financing, management, and monitoring of the CAP, and the second on common market organisation (CMO) of agricultural products.

The Commission will then provide an update on the situation in EU agricultural markets. There will also be an exchange of views on Task Force Rural Africa (TFRA) and on current challenges in the field of plant protection.

There is currently one item scheduled under "any other business": information from the Commission on the implementation of the European maritime and fisheries fund (EMFF).

[HCWS1085]

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Foreign Affairs Council: 19 November 2018

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): I will attend the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) on 19 November. It will be chaired by the High Representative of the European Union (EU) for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HRVP), Federica Mogherini, and will take place in Brussels.

The FAC will discuss current affairs, central Asia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine and Yemen.

Foreign Affairs Council

Central Asia

Ministers will discuss the EU's role in central Asia ahead of the EU-Central Asia Foreign Ministers' meeting on 23 November that HRVP Mogherini and Foreign Ministers from the five central Asian states will attend. The significance of the region has grown as Russia

seeks to reassert its influence with countries to its south and as China continues to expand its westward trade routes. There are positive regional dynamics with better co-operation between states, as well as engagement with Afghanistan. The UK supports the EU expanding its activity across the central Asian region.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Ministers will discuss the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) following the elections on 7 October. The UK will work with partners to promote a balanced and constructive European approach to BiH, focusing on the urgent needs for Government formation and socio-economic and other reforms for the benefit of all BiH citizens.

Ukraine

Ministers will discuss the recent spate of restrictive actions taken by Russia in the Azov Sea towards shipping using Ukrainian ports, and the so-called "elections" in the "Luhansk People's Republic" and "Donetsk People's Republic" held on 11 November in violation of the Minsk agreements. The UK supports the need to take firm action on Russian aggression, bringing Russia to account for its failure to fulfil Minsk agreement obligations, and to support the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. Our long-term vision for Ukraine is for a stable, resilient country that is a net contributor to European security, capable of defending its sovereignty, managing crises and resolving conflict peacefully and with the internal capacity to meet the needs of its citizens. Both presidential and parliamentary elections will be held in 2019, so it is vital Ukraine preserves the progress on reforms, particularly tackling corruption and promoting greater accountability and transparency.

Yemen

Ministers will discuss the situation on Yemen and how best to support the UN special envoy to make progress towards a sustainable political settlement that will underpin a long-term solution in Yemen. We will encourage all EU partners to support the UN special envoy's proposals for de-escalation and confidence-building measures including the talks that he will convene in Stockholm at the end of November.

Council conclusions

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on security and defence, Afghanistan, small arms and light weapons (SALW), the civilian compact, Pakistan, water diplomacy, Sudan and Ethiopia.

[HCWS1084]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

National Cervical Screening Programme Incident

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Brine): I am today informing the House of a serious incident relating to the 'call and recall' process administered by Primary Care Support England (PCSE), a service provided by Capita on behalf of NHS England as part of the national cervical cancer screening programme.

The NHS cervical cancer screening programme saves an estimated 5,000 lives a year by detecting abnormalities of the cervix early and referring women for effective treatment. It is offered to women aged 25 to 49 every three years and those aged 50 to 64 every five years.

On 17 October, NHS England and Public Health England were informed by Capita that a number of cervical screening invitation and reminder letters had not been sent to women inviting them to make a routine cervical screening appointment. Following further urgent investigation of this incident since then, I can now confirm that between January and June 2018, 43,220 women did not receive one or other of these letters and, in a very small minority of cases, neither the invitation nor reminder. In addition, Capita has also informed us that, between January and October 2018, a further 4,508 women were not sent letters informing them of the result of their cervical screening.

In light of this, NHS England declared this as a serious incident and set up a clinically-led multiagency incident panel including PCSE, Public Health England and NHS Digital on 23 October 2018 to assess any risk or harm to the women affected. The panel has put in place actions to assess and mitigate any risk as well as care and support where needed. Daily audits are now in place to ensure all women's files are accounted for, and the panel is looking closely with Capita at how parts of the process could be automated to reduce errors.

Capita has confirmed that this incident was caused by files from their call and recall operations team not being correctly sent and uploaded to Capita's print and despatch service between January and October 2018. Capita has accepted full responsibility for this incident and has apologised for it.

For the majority of the 4,508 women who did not receive their result letter, their result was normal. However, 182 women had a result that required a follow-up test (colposcopy) and 252 women needed an early repeat screening test. In most instances, where the screening result requires further tests or treatments, the laboratory will usually refer the woman directly to a colposcopy clinic independently of the woman receiving her result letter from Capita. For women needing early repeat testing, their GP routinely follows up these tests. However, to make sure all women needing a colposcopy or an early repeat test are being managed correctly, every woman's screening record is being checked to ensure they have been referred appropriately. No harm has been identified to date.

Capita has made a public apology and has written to all the women who did not receive invitation or reminder letters and to those who did not get their normal result letter. Letters and apologies are being sent to all women who have not been referred for colposcopy or who have not had the required follow up screening test. In addition, the GPs of women affected have been informed so they can offer support to their patients.

The results of the screening and further tests on all women affected by this incident will be monitored over time to ensure any impact is followed up.

In addition to reviewing the checks in place around file transfer and checking the number of files processed, sent, printed and dispatched, Capita has produced a briefing for staff and proposed additional automation to the process to remove manual steps that may have contributed to this incident.

Our priority is patient safety and we will be assembling a clinical board that will provide oversight for the cervical screening call and recall service. This will ensure that every part of the process has an in-depth review.

NHS England is also undertaking an independent expert review of its screening programmes.

The Government continue to closely monitor the performance of all our suppliers and to implement improvement plans where necessary. Officials are working with Capita to ensure that the process recommendations and lessons learned from this issue are applied to similar services across Capita's public sector contracts.

Incidents of this type not only are unacceptable in terms of the impact they have on the women affected, but undermine public confidence in our screening programmes as a whole.

[HCWS1086]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Rural Crime and Public Services: Response to Opposition Day Debate

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): On 6 June 2018 this Parliament debated a motion about rural crime and public services. Many of the crimes mentioned during the debate, such as domestic violence and modern slavery, know no boundaries and can be found in urban and rural areas alike. However, the Government recognise that certain crimes, such as hare coursing and livestock offences, can be an additional pressure in rural areas.

We therefore welcome the rural affairs strategy published by the National Police Chiefs' Council which, developed following a period of consultation with rural stakeholders, sets out operational and organisational policing priorities in respect of tackling crimes that particularly affect rural areas. It is very much intended that the strategy will support safer rural communities and a better rural focus in policing.

Members on all sides of the House emphasised the need to ensure that rural communities are not disadvantaged in the delivery or quality of public services to tackle crime. The Government are committed to providing all police forces in England and Wales with the resources they need to do their crucial work. As the Chancellor of the Exchequer made clear at the Budget, we recognise the pressures on the police from the changing nature of crime. The Home Secretary is reviewing police spending power and further options for reform ahead of the provisional police funding settlement in December.

In 2017, the Minister for Policing and the Fire Service spoke to every police force in England and Wales about the demands they faced, including many frontline officers. Alongside that, the Home Office undertook a robust assessment of demands and pressures on the police which found that, since 2015, there had been substantial changes in the demands on the police, with the make-up of recorded crime shifting towards more complex and resource intensive crimes, such as sexual offences and modern slavery. Increases in the reporting of high harm "hidden" crimes have affected both urban and rural forces across England and Wales.

This work led directly to a comprehensive funding settlement that is increasing total investment in the police by over £460 million in 2018-19. This includes £50 million for counter-terrorism, £130 million for national priorities and £280 million in force funding from increases in council tax precept income. The pressures on territorial policing were spread across England and Wales, so it was right to enable every police force, rural and urban alike, to protect their funding in real terms in 2018-19, including precept income.

Our work on demand is continuing. We are working closely with the policing sector in order to build the evidence base for the next spending review, to ensure the police continue to receive the resources they need. The existing police allocation formula includes population sparsity as a factor. The Government will consider the issue of the police funding formula in the context of the next spending review.

[HCWS1087]

Ministerial Correction

Thursday 15 November 2018

EDUCATION

Plymouth Challenge for Schools

The following is an extract from the Westminster Hall debate on the Plymouth Challenge for Schools on 6 November 2018.

Nick Gibb: As the hon. Gentleman will know, outcomes at secondary level are mixed. In 2018, 40.4% of students in Plymouth entered the English baccalaureate, which is a core group of academic GCSEs—English, maths, at least two sciences, a language and a humanity.

That figure outstrips the national average of 35.1% and is 1.5 percentage points higher than the figure for Plymouth in 2014.

[Official Report, 6 November 2018, Vol. 648, c. 490WH.]

Letter of correction from the Minister for School Standards:

An error has been identified in the speech I gave during the debate on the Plymouth Challenge for Schools.

The correct statement should have been:

Nick Gibb: As the hon. Gentleman will know, outcomes at secondary level are mixed. In 2018, 40.4% of students in Plymouth entered the English baccalaureate, which is a core group of academic GCSEs—English, maths, at least two sciences, a language and a humanity. That figure outstrips the national average of **38.5%** and is 1.5 percentage points higher than the figure for Plymouth in 2014.

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MINISTERIAL CORRECTION

Thursday 15 November 2018

	<i>Col. No.</i>
EDUCATION	3MC
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